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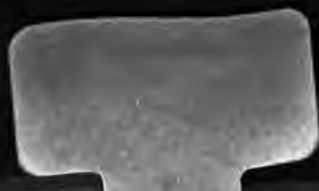
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**MIRAGE.**



# M I R A G E.

BY

GEORGE FLEMING.

AUTHOR OF "A NILE NOVEL."

In Three Volumes.

VOL. II.



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# MIRAGE.

## CHAPTER I.

### BLUE LILIES.

“JACK!” She springs forward and clutches him by the arm. “Don’t fire! Hassan!” she says wildly, with white breathless lips; “Hassan—Hassan——”

And even as she speaks there is a clattering charge of mounted men, a swinging of sabres, a slashing of whips, a cheer. The surging mob sweeps back against the steps. In a moment the dervish is seized, surrounded, forced bodily into the shelter of the mosque. Major Thayer springs from

his saddle. The Turkish soldiers clear the piazza of the last terrified stragglers. The dragoman rushes forward flourishing his *koorbash*.

"Thank God!" says Stuart, seizing Constance by the hand. And then, for the first time, Miss Varley breaks down.

"Take me home—take me home, Tom, to Fanny," she says piteously.

"Will you ride?"

"No; I don't know; take me home," she says, and walks on blindly, clinging to his arm, the centre of an excited, questioning, explaining group.

In three or four minutes they have reached the camp. As they enter the tent Miss Varley turns to Stuart:

"I haven't thanked you. But—you know," she says brokenly. She gives him both her hands. Then she sits down on a chair in a corner and begins to cry.

Mr. Stuart, too, sits down. He looks about him with a bewildered air.

"Good heavens ! Jack, are you hurt ? Will you have some brandy ? some water ? Your face is as white as a sheet ! Oh Tom, why don't you do something ? Don't you see that Jack——"

"I'm not hurt, Fanny. I've been badly frightened. I never knew what it was like before," says Mr. Stuart, simply ; "but I had Constance to take care of, you know, and—— Look here !"

He threw his revolver down upon the table. Major Thayer picks it up curiously, examines it, starts, and throws it down again with an oath.

"I let Hassan have it for that salute. I had forgotten all about it. You see—it wasn't loaded !" says Jack.

The following afternoon found them still at Nablous. Fanny did not feel well,

for one thing; her nerves had not yet recovered from yesterday's excitement. Then Abdallah's foot was no better, a horse had gone lame; the head-muleteer had a wife in Shechem.

"In fact, the more I hear our delay explained the less I seem to understand it," Major Thayer remarked testily.

They were winding up Mount Gerizim, and it was to Miss Varley he spoke. The Major had all that aversion to stopping which you notice in unoccupied people—that terror of a pause, which is so suggestive of the anticipation of a corresponding vacuum. And just now this latest annoyance found relief in a proposition peculiarly unacceptable to Constance, for :

"I shall stay here and sketch. Fanny particularly wished me to get a good sketch of Nablous. And I think she was quite

right in advising me to take it from half-way up the hill," he said.

Miss Varley suggested they could wait and all ride up together, later. Mr. Stuart thought it would be a pity to miss the sunset. Hassan was of opinion the horses needed exercise. Of course it ended in their going on.

It was a sunny, breezy afternoon. As they turned their horses' heads towards the distant mountain-top, a cool and playful air blew freshly down upon them, luring them onward to the wind-swept freedom of those heights. The very greyhound, bounding on before, seemed instinct with new force and life, making wild rushes at elusive birds, flinging his supple, golden-brown body high in air, in frantic efforts to make will take the place of wings, or pausing, erect and quivering, upon some overhanging rock to watch their slower

ascent. They were riding across a strikingly beautiful country, over both sacred and historic ground. But both were preoccupied, and both were unusually silent.

We hear so much of woman's power of intuition—now that the exemption from all that power implies, is claimed—that possibly the phrase may serve once more to account for the feeling of confused apprehension with which Miss Varley looked forward to the conclusion of this ride. Indeed she had hardly recovered as yet from the excitement and suspense of yesterday. Stuart's courage, his devotion, the simple fashion in which he had accepted her thanks, appealed, each in its different degree, to the keenest instincts of her nature. And liking, admiration, a quick responsive generosity—that very habit of thrusting self into the background which was so characteristic of this girl—were

ranged upon his side; were met, were answered by the strong involuntary recoil with which she shrank from admitting any claim — the slightest — which could modify her sentiment toward Lawrence.

“He will never know what I gave him; let me know that I gave it all!” was her inward cry.

There was a bitter satisfaction in the very completeness of the sacrifice. But now, as she rode on, her predominant sensation might have been translated into an unreasonable conviction that something was coming. And it came.

The afternoon was singularly lovely. When they reached the mountain-summit great patches of cloud-shadow were resting like so many vapourous islands on the broad billowy sweep of the plain. On one side, the blue line of the Moabite mountains melted away in a dream of distant



horizons ; on the other, the wide reach of the Mediterranean curved and glittered in the sun.

Half-way up, after they had left the Major, even after they had passed the gray olive groves amidst the rocks, there was an attempt at cultivation ; but here were stones—nothing but stones—growing larger and larger as one ascended, until the ground was littered with rows upon rows of square-hewn blocks, and the confusion culminated in a ruined building, whose small white dome is a landmark for miles across the plain.

Here they left the horses. A few steps farther on, the massive Roman wall is broken into windows. Small knotted fig-trees thrust their weather-beaten branches from between the stones, and the red anemones, bending and flickering in the wind like thin blown flames from subter-

ranean fires, added a touch of crimson grace—"Love settling unawares."

"Those trees remind me of certain personalities," Miss Varley remarked, glancing round her. "Do you remember old Mr. McMoon?"

"The old Scotchman at Jerusalem who admired you so much?"

"Yes. That is—I don't know about the admiration. I think there was something so pathetic about the poor old fellow—old, and unsightly, and grimly tenacious of life, like one of those trees. Do you know he confided to me one day, when we were all out on the roof, that he had been devoting his life since he was eighteen to making money, and, now that his fortune was made, he would like to devote his money to getting back his life?"

"The more fool he," said Jack, sententially.

“Do you really think so? He always seemed to me more like a sermon on the folly of telling people to subdue their desires while they are young, and wait for judgment before they face the world. Giving him the use of his life now was like throwing a smoked herring into the sea. He had returned to his native element again; but after a trial by fire. He was just as much of a fish as ever, only—he couldn’t swim!”

Mr. Stuart smiled. It pleased him to fancy that Constance was clever, as it had pleased him, a week before, to hear of one of his old class-mates having distinguished himself by a volume of translations from the Greek. The cleverness, in his comprehension of things, bore, perhaps, the same relation to real life as the dead language. Both were distinctions in their way, and neither prevented a pleasant

feeling of easy superiority on the part of a man who understood, and acted upon, the facts of existence.

But, just now, it pleased him most of all to lean against these crumbling ruins and watch Miss Varley's movements, the proud and gracious pose of her head, the flush of colour on her cheek. It was with a perfect, a luxurious sense of satisfaction that the young man lounged by her side in the broken embrasure, gazing idly down at those sunny fields, and saw his future stretching out before him, cheerful, and sunny, and secure as they. A premonition of approaching happiness—not of content, but of happiness, full, unmeasured, incalculable—seemed to float in the very air around him, seemed to shine and dazzle through all the sunlight of this brilliant day. He looked up at Constance; he looked back again at the valley; he

smiled ; he drew a long breath ; he hesitated. It was a supreme moment in his life.

“ I don’t know how it is,” he observed presently ; “ when I am not with you I am always waiting for you, looking for you, expecting you. I feel as though I had something of the utmost importance to tell you. And when you are there——”

He stopped and looked up suddenly ; then turned away and began thrusting his stick between the crevices in the stones.

“ That is one of the many disadvantages of a small party,” said Constance, demurely.

“ You know I never meant that !”

“ Indeed I know nothing of the kind ! I’ve a very good memory, I assure you.”

“ I should like to think you remembered something else I told you yesterday,” said Jack.

Miss Varley blushed, and felt herself blushing.

“What one says is of less consequence. I never shall forget what you did. Never. I shall never thank you for it, because——”

“I don’t want to be thanked. I would do anything for you.”

“You have done a great deal.” She put out her hand, and picked a flower growing on the arch above her head. “I think we had better be going. Tom will be waiting,” she said.

“Are you not comfortable where you are?”

“Yes. But Tom——”

“Tom be hanged! You are always in such a hurry to go,” says Jack, reproachfully. “Now I—I am different. And, beside that, I want you to stay here. I want to talk to you. Constance.”

“Well?”

"I wish you would tell me something about yourself. You always speak of other people—of me. It is not my own story I want to know, it is yours. Tell me——"

"There is nothing to tell."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. What sort of a story could I have? What do I ever do, what have I ever done that could interest you?" she answered, a little hurriedly. "I never went anywhere until we came here. I never had an adventure in my life until yesterday. I could give you the names of a thousand books or so I have read in the last three years. I can't tell you anything else. And if I did——"

"Well? If you did?"

"You would not understand."

"Try me," said Jack, eagerly.

She shook her head. "You would not understand," she said.

And I, for one, am inclined to believe that she was right. We see in others what we are prepared to see in them, not what they actually represent. The difference between these two people was a difference of temperament, of aim, of quality, of a hundred irreconcilable things.

Above all, it was a difference of aim; and there is, perhaps, more vital separation implied in this difference of desires than in the most opposing circumstance.

But of this, which she felt vaguely, he was quite unconscious. He never imagined for a moment that a woman's opinions were less open to modification—of more importance as regarded his relation to her—than her dress. If you had hinted to Mr. Stuart that Constance might object to marry him because he took his idea of Browning from the newspapers, preferred



Mark Twain to Sophocles, and thought the Mona Lisa a plain woman with a high forehead—not half so pretty as the photographs of half-a-dozen girls he knew—well, the probabilities are he would have considered you mad.

“You spoke of three years ago. How strange it is we should have known each other then. I had seen you, and I did not know—I mean—who could have ever imagined we should be here to-day together as—as we are.”

“Three years! It is a long time,” said Constance.

“You have not changed.”

“You think not?”

She looked away down into the sunlit valley, and little by little the light faded out of her face.

“I *have* changed,” she said slowly. She twisted the flower she held between her

fingers, and laid its blossom absently against her lips. "I *have* changed."

"Yes, so have I," said the young man eagerly. "I know now—what I didn't know then, Constance." He leaned forward a little and took her hand in his. She did not move away, but her fingers grew cold and trembled, and she kept her eyes fixed upon her lap. "Give me that flower," said Jack.

"No."

"Constance!"

And now she looked up and saw him standing before her—a tall, handsome fellow, his face all aglow with excitement and passionate hope. Her eyes dropped.

"You will give me that flower?"

"No," said Constance again.

"Look at me! I—— Look at me, Constance, dearest! Why—why do you think I want it?"

Constance did not answer.

“See here !” the young man said, impetuously. He put his hand in his breast-pocket ; took out a card-case. His hand shook as he began turning over its leaves. “Look !” There was a Syrian lily pressed between the pages. “Do you know where I got that ? You gave it to me. You gave it to me on the way to Jericho. I shall never forget that day. It was the first time—— I want you to give me that flower because—I love you. I love you, Constance !”

“No !” Miss Varley, too, had risen to her feet ; she had pushed away Lione’s head ; her flowers had fallen to the ground. And now she lifted up her face, and looked at him with grave, compassionate eyes. “It is impossible,” she said gently.

“Impossible, Constance ? But I love you !”

"Yes. I am—very sorry," she said. Her eyes were full of tears.

And then there was a long silence.

"Dear Jack," the girl says presently, going up to him and laying her hand upon his arm, "I am so sorry. If I could have helped it—— But you—you would not understand."

"Do you think I did not?" he answers bitterly. "Oh, you need not be alarmed. You are right enough. I am not going to blame you. It is no one's fault but my own, and I—I loved you so!" he says, with a sudden break and tremor in his voice.

"Dear Jack!"

"Constance, you do care for me—you will! I don't say now, but some time; you—you must care for me some time!" he says wildly. "Constance! you are so good, so dear; it is impossible you should

be so cruel to me!" For the first time in his experience he has been exalted, lifted above himself by a wave of supreme emotion. "I—I can't believe it!" he cries, with a sort of bewildered rage. "It's impossible. You cannot—you will not mean it," he says imploringly, seizing her hand in his. "Constance——"

"I cannot, Jack. I like you; I am very fond of you. I will always be your friend——"

"And you will never love me?"

Miss Varley was silent.

"Never?"

"Never."

"Well, that's hard!" said Stuart, drawing a long breath.

He got up; walked away a few paces. Lione sprang to his feet and stood watching him in eager expectation of the signal to move on.

Constance too rose, and looked about her, and paused, irresolute. She was profoundly moved by the sight of his distress.

A woman can rarely persuade herself that by refusing to marry a man she has not inflicted upon him a serious injury, and this in the face of the clearest conviction of the utter unsuitableness of the match. It is true that we are more apt to estimate a gift by what it costs us than by the value it represents to another. Before blaming Constance for this—for anything which followed—it would perhaps be well to remember how all her own conception of suffering was centred, as it were, about this one phase of experience—the pain of baffled desire. Memory intensified her comprehension of Stuart's disappointment. The thought of Denis was one with the impulse which made her go forward a few steps and put out her hand.

“Jack!”

Mr. Stuart turned, his sunburnt boyish face wearing a look which surely it had never worn before.

“Don’t distress yourself. It hasn’t been your fault. Other fellows have been through this sort of thing before now,” he says; “only — if you are expecting something different——”

There is a pause, and then: “Well! that is over,” he says firmly. “Shall we go down? Tom will be waiting.”

This time it is Miss Varley who hesitates. She hesitates, and then, perhaps, with a sense of the hopelessness of further discussion, perhaps even with some slight recognition of the superior wisdom of silence, she gathers up her gloves and whip and signifies her readiness to go.

Mr. Stuart’s note-case is still lying on the window-ledge.

"You have left your pocket-book," she says, pointing with her whip.

He took it up, looked at it, took out the faded lily and held it in his hand.

"See! I can let it go now, but it has left a stain," he said sadly, and let the discoloured petals flutter to the ground.

They walked down to where the horses were waiting, without another word, and, once mounted, they picked their way down the difficult mountain-trail with a burning consciousness of the irrevocable and the changed. And as they rode on thus in agitated silence :

"Hollo! Why, you're not going to ride over me, are you?" said a brisk and cheerful voice.

It was Major Thayer—the Major, whom they had quite forgotten—sitting upon his camp-stool in the shade of an olive, smoking, his white hat resting on the back of



his head, and a quiet smile of middle-aged content playing about his mouth as he sat and contemplated his sketch.

The commonplaces of life reasserted themselves with a start.

“Well, any new facts about the Samaritans?” the Major asked; and it was Mr. Stuart who answered him, with admirable composure. The ride had been—well, quite worth taking. It was rather rough on the horses, certainly. He had noticed as they were coming down that Miss Varley’s horse was going a little lame on the right off foot. But the view was quite what “Murray” described.

“So you are glad you went, Constance?”

Miss Varley had turned round to call Lione. She did not hear.

“So it seems we have all been making good use of an afternoon,” the Major concluded cheerfully. “I don’t brag much of

my sketches as a general thing ; but if you will just look at that bit of distance there—— And the way that minaret comes out between the trees—— Why, hang it all, man, don't stand in your own light ! Here, pass it over to Constance. And I think," said the major, complacently, folding up his camp-stool and shutting up his box, "I think, for once, Fanny will be satisfied with all of us."

And again it was Mr. Stuart who answered. He had no doubt of it. And all through dinner — through the ordeal of Fanny's questioning—all through the long evening which followed, the young man preserved this unruffled calm. It is true Mrs. Thayer observed he never looked at Constance ; but then, on the other hand, they spoke to each other often and pleasantly ; nor in his manner of addressing Miss Varley could his critic detect the

slightest deviation from the general tenor of his speech. It was only after dinner, when the ladies had both retired, and Jack and the Major were sitting together in that friendly silence which is the exclusive prerogative of our sex, that Mr. Stuart exhibited any symptoms of disquiet.

He got up, poured himself out a glass of whisky and water, lit a cigar, set the glass down on the table, and threw the cigar on the floor.

"I'm going out," he said briefly, and suited the action to the word.

It was a still and starry night. The camp was pitched on a small circular plateau overhanging the ravine. The young man thrust his hands in his pocket, walked over to the farther side and looked down. The shadowy mass of Mount Ebal towered up darkly before him, dimly outlined against the clearer sky. A sound of running water

gurgled softly through the stillness. He could hear the jackals calling to one another from the coverts of the mountain.

He stood there a long while, meditating. He turned his head and looked at a tent where the light was still shining, he glanced up at the stars above him ; once he even whistled softly to himself, and it may be that at this moment a vague idea of shooting jackals mingled with his more sentimental musings. But there was, perhaps, less philosophy than might have been expected in this patient lingering to see the last glimmer of light extinguished in that particular tent, or in the half-uttered blessing with which he turned away.

“Stuyvesant couldn’t do it. But I’ll do it yet!” he said between his teeth with sudden energy, and looked up as though taking the silent stars to witness of his resolve. The stars shone calmly bright.

It may be a more impassioned lover would have seen some cold and still denial in that calm ; a more superstitious watcher might even have attached some foolish significance to the wild, rattling peal of derisive laughter with which the jackals greeted his remark. But then, Mr. Stuart was not superstitious.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN ARCADY.

"AND then?"

"Oh, then we went all the way up to the top. I've told you that before."

"And then?"

"Then we did like the king of France."

"The king of——"

"France. Who rode up a hill with all his twenty thousand men, and then—rode down again. Fanny, your historical education has been neglected."

"I do wish you would be serious," said Mrs. Thayer.

"I am serious ; perfectly so. If you

are curious to know what we talked about, my dear, why that is another question. I remember speaking of Mr. McMoon for one thing. There was a fig-tree up there that looked exactly like Mr. McMoon."

"Mr. McMoon had the face of a monkey," Fanny remarked impatiently.

"That only shows what a good old family he belongs to. I think it is rather nice myself to resemble one's ancestors," the girl answered gravely.

They were on their way to Samaria, riding along a narrow path under leafy boughs by the side of a foaming mill-race. Constance was near the palanquin; Mr. Stuart and the Major far on in advance; and the expression on Miss Varley's face was hardly in strict unison with the nonsense she was talking.

Possibly Mrs. Thayer was aware of the discrepancy.

"I wonder," she said presently, looking up with an innocent air, "I wonder what Aunt Van—we are sure to meet Aunt Van at Damascus—what she will think of Jack?" And then, receiving no answer, "I am so disappointed in Jack," she went on, in a regretful manner.

"Why, Fanny?"

"Well, one expects confidence from a *friend*," said Fanny, softly.

Miss Varley blushed. "I—you must admit yourself, Fanny, that there are certain things——"

"Oh, I was speaking of Jack, my dear. You and I are very old friends indeed. It would be a pity if we could not understand each other," said Mrs. Thayer, sweetly.

It was a fact that they had known each other a long while. Looking back, Constance could hardly remember a scene



in her life in which Fanny had not played her pretty complacent part. There was never a subject, save one, in which Fanny's preference had not had its influence; or ever a pleasure, again with that exception, in which Fanny had not shared. And to a nature endowed with the fatal gift of sentiment, this very habit of giving constituted an irresistible claim. "Constance would do anything for me," was Fanny's habitual formula. It seemed to Mrs. Thayer a truly providential arrangement that she should have this opportunity of superintending the fashioning of her friend's life. For, curiously enough, the admiration was chiefly on the other side. With all Fanny's affectionate solicitude, and she was really very fond of Constance, there was mingled some secret doubt and wonder at a simple and generous credulity she was quite unfitted to understand.

For, indeed, it is rather remarkable to what a superlative degree of contempt for human nature the average individual can attain, by simply shutting his eyes to the existence of any loftier standard than that by which he measures his own acts.

But they are riding to Samaria. It is a soft gray morning. The sky is overcast, and the warm gusts of wind spatter sharp raindrops in their faces, but as yet there is no shower. They have not been riding long before the road turns abruptly to the right, and begins climbing the terraced hill to the breezy upland of old Samaria. Its rows of discrowned columns, wind-eaten and worn and gray, stand in an orchard of gray fig-trees, leafless as yet, but with some subtle hint of colour playing about them and foretelling spring. The loose thin veil of clouds gives a new tenderness of colouring to the day. There

is nothing jarring, nothing to disturb this sweet monotony of soft gray skies, gray olive-groves, and the fresh vivid green of the rain-awakened grass. Some of the columns are stained with yellow lichen, and all are defaced and time-worn. Nature has so taken them to her heart they have become of the very texture of the moss-grown trees about them; and there seems nothing startling, nothing incongruous, in finding them thus alone amidst the freshness of the blossoming fields.

“I will make Samaria as an heap of the field and as plantings of a vineyard,” Constance quoted beneath her breath. They had ridden up to the crest of the hill and there dismounted. Major Thayer was making a sketch.

They were standing perhaps on the very site of the great Baal temple. Here had been the groves of Ashtaroth; here the

brazen serpent that Moses made ; and here the flaming chariot and horses of the sun. Looking across the swelling upland, "fair with the precious things of the lasting hills, the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof," where the people had set up their images and groves in every high hill and under every green tree, they could see perhaps the very path the prophet had taken, going out to the wilderness, to yet another chariot and other horses of fire.

It was curious to turn from those Chaldean sages, grave Eastern worshippers of all the hosts of heaven—through the turbulent blood-stained reign of Jewish prophet and king—to these pilgrims of a later day, these worshippers of another faith, heralded by yet another Star in the East. And still the young flowers smiled and danced like children in the sweet morning air ; the

patient mother earth thrilled, responsive, to the wooing touch of yet another spring; and all the familiar miracle of life swept, and breathed, and broke with ever fresh insistence about the lonely hill.

An Arab was ploughing his orchard, among the columns, under the trees. At the end of the furrow he paused; he leaned his arms upon his plough—the sharpened root of a tree; the big brown oxen stood still, and all three turned their heads and gazed at the strangers with slow indifferent eyes. He went on with his work without even lifting his head as the travellers rode away.

Down by the village another surprise was awaiting them—a Gothic cathedral, roofless and sunken, but otherwise entire. It was built——

“Don’t tell me it was built by the Empress Helena,” said Constance, laugh-

ing. "That terrible woman! she is as unescapable as original sin!"

"This is where John the Baptist is buried. Will you hand me that 'Murray,' Tom? Yes; here's the place: 'The total length of the interior——' That's not it. 'A little chamber excavated deep in the rock, to which the descent is by——' Oh Jack, would you mind going down into that hole and counting the steps? Dr. Adams would be so interested——"

"Then somebody must come with me to carry the candle," said Jack.

"I'll go."

Miss Varley took a light from the dragoon. "Let me go first. You might fall;" and then Fanny, looking down into the pit, hears only a confused murmur of voices. The lights twinkle and disappear.

"Brava, Fanny. Very neat, indeed," says the Major, laying down his sketch-

book and beginning to sharpen a pencil, "Very neat, my dear."

"Neat?" Mrs. Thayer looks about her with an air of ingenuous wonder. "People have different opinions, I know—and, of course, I don't pretend to be much of a judge of architecture; but, upon my word, it is the first time I ever heard the word applied to a ruin!" she says, with a toss of her head.

Major Thayer's laughter was distinctly audible in the vault below.

"Tom is enjoying himself," said Constance, with a smile. She held the candle higher and looked about the blank walls of the dungeon. A long white lizard started at the unwonted light, scurrying across the stones. There was a slow dripping of water at the farther end of the room.

"Do you believe John the Baptist was really buried here?"

"I don't know."

"Do you care?"

"Not much. Do you?"

"No."

They both laughed. "Here! give me the light to carry," said Stuart, with sudden gravity.

"Constance!"

"Well?"

He turned abruptly; held the candle closer to the wall and began examining the jointure of the blocks.

"There isn't any mortar. It looks more like Roman work," he began. And then, facing round suddenly; "You said, yesterday, that we might be friends. Very well. I accept your offer. We will be—friends," he said, steadily, and held out his hand.

Fanny looked at them curiously as they came up the steps again and out into the dazzling daylight.



"Well?"

"Oh, there was nothing!"

"Not even the steps," says Major Thayer, gravely. "Constance, are you a good judge of architecture? Fanny is——"

"It was the least thing you could do, to go down and look at the grave of your patron saint," says Fanny, hastily, turning to Stuart.

Was John the Baptist Jack's patron saint? The Major professed himself profoundly ignorant upon these questions. "But was not John, your namesake, the John who lost his head for a woman—for Salome?" he asks, with a peculiar smile.

While they were waiting for the horses, Jack strolled away carelessly down the road between the cactus-hedges. For a wonder he came back with his hands full of flowers.

“Will you have some blue lilies?” he said to Constance.

It was a long, still, uneventful morning. There was a sense of ineffable repose in the sight of those soft low-hanging clouds, in the touch of that soft and windless air. At luncheon-time they left the rocky path, forded the wide shallow bed of the brook that since earliest morning had mingled its joyous babble with their own more desultory talk, and stretched themselves out at ease upon the short close grass of the mountain-slope. The horses were picketed amongst the trees. A few paces off the muleteers were coming and going, were piling armfuls of crackling thorn upon the noonday fire. Now and then a pale gleam of sunlight awoke a splendour of colour among the rocks, deep embedded in flowers—large cupped anemones, purple and red and opal white; white daisies,

yellow chrysanthemums ; rose - coloured cyclamen, and silvery mallows with dark curling leaves, and low creeping thyme. Now and then some sudden raindrops made a soft quick pattering overhead.

“Have you any money in your pockets? Hark! I hear the first cuckoo of the spring,” said Fanny.

They listened. The melancholy love-cry of the homeless bird called to them from the far-off unseen woods. They listened. There stole a sound of clear continuous fluting on the air. A thin sweet sound of shepherds piping to their flocks ; pure and remote as though floating down to them from out some sunny vale of Arcady ; a faint, unfamiliar joyousness of melody, which made them pause, and turn, and look, in the silence of incredulous delight. And as the sweet sound ceased they heard

the humming of bees deep in thick-creeping thyme.

"This *is* pastoral. A perfect idyl," said the Major.

Lione lifted his sleek head, pricked up his ears, and growled.

"There comes the little beggar himself," said Jack.

There was a soft pattering of many feet across the turf, and the boy passed before them, still fingering his oaten pipe, and followed by a troop of long-haired goats.

"Do listen to him again," said Constance.

They listened again. The dappled sunshine flickered to and fro with the gentle stirring of the wind among the leaves. The air was delicious; the breeze was soft and fitful; the sense of peace profound. The boy went on playing. The wise old

goats shook all their venerable beards, nibbling the flower-spotted grass. Here and there some black-faced patriarch of the flock raised himself up, planting his sharp feet firmly in the black ivy, and tearing down green wreaths of honeysuckle, or stretched his long neck upwards to crop the tender shoots of the wild olive. The boy played upon his pipe. Jack tossed him a piece of bread. He let it lie at his feet ; placidly looked and played.

“By Jove ! the little rascal isn’t hungry,” said Jack.

“How could you throw it at him in that way ? But do listen,” said Constance.

And now the shepherd blew more softly on his flute, idly, slowly ; the goats came trooping down together, jostling each other, by twos and threes. He turned without a word, and passed away between the olives ; and still, as he turned away, the fitful

notes stole plaintively back borne by the fitful wind.

"I call this exquisite," said Constance, with a deep-drawn sigh of pleasure.

And it was exquisite. It was like Theocritus: something lovely, and young, and utterly untouched by care, full of the simple delight of being.

"Dear child, what do you care for that boy and his whistle and his nasty goats? You haven't eaten a thing. Do take a sardine. That little wretch knows nothing of sardines and olives."

And here Jack, who was lying like a young Theseus, leaning on his elbow, suddenly bent forward.

"By Jove! Look—look, quick! Two lizards fighting. See the little beasts. They mean mischief."

"Dear me; how can you look at anything so horrid?" said Fanny.

"They are furious," said Jack. "See them twist. There, they roll over! He's caught the other fellow by the throat. By Jove! I believe he'll kill him in another minute."

Tom leaned forward; Constance turned; Mrs. Thayer went on eating *pâté de foie gras*.

The lizards were locked together, ferocious, intense; their scaly backs were of the most vivid green. The one had gripped the other by the under side of his throat, the jaw sharp-shut upon its soft white skin. The victim was panting, writhing, struggling for release.

"But he will kill him! Do separate them, do!" cried Constance.

"Yes," said the Major, "it's a death-struggle. And look at Madame Lizard hurrying off, she who has caused the row. See her delicate ladyship scurrying away.

Just like a woman! She can't endure the sight of her own mischief."

"She is horrid," said Constance; "an ugly gray thing, not worth looking at. But don't let that dreadful green beast kill the other one. Do stop them, Jack."

Jack rose and pushed them apart with the end of his riding-whip. They did not even notice his intrusion. They were mad with battle. He had literally to pry them apart; and, as he did so, they swiftly ran in circles, head to tail and tail to head, snapping at each other's throats, and again the weakest one rolled hopelessly over. Again Jack pried them apart; this time the smaller one tried to escape, but only to be pursued, overtaken, seized.

And now even Fanny surrendered her comfortable seat, and stood up to see the fray.



"How can you?" Constance asked.

"Oh, let them have it out. Why stop them? It's nature; and I'm curious to see which will win."

"Yes," said Jack, "it's nature; but the little fellow is plucky, and he's Constance's *protégé*. He shan't be killed."

"Yes," said Tom, "play Providence; rescue the one who shows the most fight."

And this time the larger one glided away, leaving his victim panting among the olive-roots.

"Rather knocked out of time that last round," Mr. Stuart remarked, poking him up with his stick.

"Oh Jack, please——"

"Hollo! here comes my lady back again," said Jack.

The timid, plain little animal came out of its hole, and furtively looked about.

"Oh, woman, not too bright or good,"

&c.," said Tom, leaning back and lighting his cigar. "She has welcomed the hero of the fight, and now she comes out in pity to look after the victim. There's a touch of nature for you! Lovely woman! whichever side loses she wins, and finds time to console both parties. And here endeth the first lesson. Pass me those matches, Jack."

"Nonsense," said Fanny, tossing her head.

"No," said Constance, "she suffers for both sides. Her sympathies are wide and impersonal. She is an angel of pity."

"As though a man wanted pity," said Jack.

"Well, I don't know," said Constance, thoughtlessly; "you know it is the very next thing to love."

Mr. Stuart was looking at the landscape.

## CHAPTER III.

SHOWING HOW MR. STUART BROKE HIS  
BRIDLE.

### THE Plain of Esdraelon.

It was one day last winter, a Sunday, and Constance was in church. It was a bitterly cold morning;—bitterly cold, that is to say, for the ragged groups of men and women huddled about the station-house fires, loitering before the eating-house windows, crouching over the gratings before the newspaper offices to feel the warmth of the steam-fed machines; striving in a hundred forlorn fashions to retain some

hold upon their objectionable and unimportant lives;—but here, in church, it was warm enough in all conscience. It was too warm. Pastor, and discourse, and people—all were suffering alike for want of a little freshness.

Well, the Litany was over. A well-dressed congregation had listened in well-bred silence to the repeated and mellifluous admission, on the part of the choir, that they were miserable sinners. Saint Clare's is famous for its music. Last winter the primo-soprano alone drew a salary of fifteen hundred dollars a year. Her stage name, I believe, was De Montmorency. The Litany was over; the Ten Commandments had been rehearsed with decorous speed. The clergyman—(a pale young man with a severe and ascetic face; a pastor who spoke to his prosperous flock with a hardly-veiled contempt, and the moment after

was well-nigh moved to tears at the thought of the Virgin Mary ; an ambitious man, who yet would cheerfully imperil his standing in the diocese and his future prospects in life by the lighting of an extra candle for conscience' sake ; an enthusiast, ready to undergo martyrdom for the folding of a chasuble ; equally ready, perhaps, to make a " neat thing " out of the disposal of the church's corner lot)—the clergyman had glided into his pulpit, and the sermon had begun.

It had begun, it had even been progressing for some minutes, when those words, " the Plain of Esdraelon," fell disconnected and imperative among the wandering thoughts of Constance. And straightway there arose before her a vision of wide fields. The crowded church grew dim, faded away ; for miles and miles she saw the meadowland opening out before her

eyes—here, a flaming mass of red anemones; there, yellow and white with myriad nodding daisies; farther on, a sheet of burning azure in the sun. Again she saw the noble lines of the landscape lifting and falling with the large freedom of the sea, to rise and lose themselves at last in the shadowy blue mountains at the horizon. The day was perfection; the sweet rain-washed air blew soft as a caress. All about them the tempered intensity of the sunshine was transfiguring the land until each sun-filled flower-cup burned with vivid and individual life. And there is an intangible, an intoxicating quality in this Syrian spring not to be rendered in words. There is no element of sadness in the landscape here. Judæa, silent and desolate and bare, has still a certain reticence, a self-satisfied, self-sufficing expression in her very austerity. The ineffable languor, the

profound melancholy of the Italian landscape, has no place among these abandoned and luxuriant plains ; and yet, how often that morning had they not been reminded of that "gray Campagna sea?" Even Fanny spoke of it after awhile.

"I never could understand what people rave about the Roman Campagna for," Stuart remarked. "For my part I think, if people cared so much for the beauties of nature as they pretend to, they would keep their enthusiasm for places where there was something to look at, like the Yosemite, for instance, or Switzerland. I can understand admiring Mont Blanc, now, but the Campagna ! Why it's nothing but a big field."

"And what do you do with your classics, then, you young vandal, you," the Major demanded.

"Well, I let them pretty much alone

as a general rule," said Jack, with his honest laugh. "I didn't come abroad to write a book; I came to enjoy myself. Classical associations may be all very well in their way for some fellows. I like something more modern myself. Why," said the young man, with a great air of scorn, "I've spent the best part of eight or nine years pegging away at Latin and Greek. You can't suppose I *like* them."

"Jack, have you ever heard me calumniate my friends in their presence?" said the Major, solemnly.

"The fact is," Mr. Stuart rejoined, "I'm an American, and I'm glad of it. I don't care to belong to any country where all the biggest men are in their graves. The fact is, Europe has been exaggerated. I don't want to blame the natives for what may not be entirely their own fault, poor devils! I don't censure any man for stick-



ing up for his own institutions, whatever *my* opinion may be of their merits," said this magnanimous young critic; "but when I want something lively, something go-ahead-looking, I know where to expect it, that's all! Somehow, I don't seem to feel very uneasy in my mind about America."

"I thought it was only the typical Britisher who was supposed to travel for the purpose of dividing the world into Englishmen and 'foreigners,'" said Constance.

"Oh, you mustn't imagine I'm not glad to have been over on this side, for once. There's the Leaning Tower at Pisa, now—I shall always be glad to have seen the Leaning Tower—and Vesuvius; and the Colosseum; and St. Peter's. St. Peter's was about as large as I expected."

"St. Peter's is like a tomb," said Con-

stance. "All the Roman churches are like tombs. But St. Peter's is like a great receiving-vault where a dead religion is laid out in state."

"Ah, Florence is the place for me," said Major Thayer, "Florence and the pictures——"

"Oh, I went to see the galleries too. Because I don't like pictures you needn't think I don't go and see them," said Jack, ingenuously. "I haven't missed a gallery yet—except when it was a question of catching a train. I was more than two hours in the Uffizzi at Florence. There was a Venus there, I remember—Titian's Venus. I thought she was very pretty."

"Ah yes. It is considered rather a pretty thing, I believe," said the Major, composedly, flicking at his horse's ears with his whip; "when we go back we must try and go over some galleries together,

Jack. I should like to have your opinion——”

“But I’m not so sure—I mean, I have not made up my mind when and how I shall go back yet,” Mr. Stuart remarked gravely.

The Major opened his eyes, looked at Constance. Miss Varley was watching Lione. “Oh, indeed,” he said; “I didn’t know;” and fell to whistling pensively.

At midday they halted by the side of a shallow brawling river. A vigorous growth of thick up-springing oleanders followed its course. Some Bedaween were watering their cattle among the bushes.

“Are there many of those men about here, Hassan?”

“Well, sir, plenty, sir.”

“Do you know what tribe they belong to?”

"How I know him, sir? You think perhaps I know that kind of men."

"But somebody must know how many there are. Doesn't the Government take any kind of census?"

Hassan looked puzzled. He carefully rubbed a bit of mud off the knee of his black trowsers, coughed, gave an order to the cook.

"The Major means, doesn't the Government ever count these men. Send people out here to find out how many there are, and how they live," explained Mr. Stuart.

A look of dignified remonstrance came over the dragoman's face.

"What for the Government count them? You think, perhaps, Turkish Government got nothing to do but count men," he said reprovingly.

Jack laughed.

"Well, they don't look a particularly

formidable lot, in spite of those long lances," the Major remarked leisurely, taking a survey of the scene.

"No, sir; very good men, sir. I tell the ladies be careful not leave things about. Bedawy steal everything he see," said Hassan, doggedly. He felt that he was being cross-examined. An unfair advantage had been taken of his willingness to impart information he did not possess. From the blue tassel of his fez to the point of his patent-leather boots, there was not an inch of his short, thick-set, broad-cloth-covered body which did not protest against the affront.

The day had grown very warm. It was the first time since their arrival in Palestine that they had been compelled to lunch out in the open. Fanny pitied them very much from the vantage-ground of her shady seat in the palanquin. It

was especially hard, as she remarked, on poor dear Constance, who had already been riding all the morning in the sun.

The heat made everybody drowsy. As the afternoon wore on, the train was more and more scattered—a long, irregular line of silent horsemen; the jangling mules of the palanquin slowly and noisily bringing up the rear. The dragoman had loitered far behind, talking to an acquaintance—a little old man, muffled to his eyes in folds of white linen, riding a diminutive donkey and followed by a boy carrying his pipe—whom they had picked up by the way.

The muleteers were half of them asleep, only now and then some guttural malediction followed the stumbling of a tired horse. Luigi was leading the way, humming an air from an opera in shrill falsetto, sitting sideways upon a baggage-

mule among a battery of kitchen pots and pans.

"May one ask what you are thinking of?" said Stuart, suddenly, checking his horse to let Miss Varley overtake him; "you are very silent."

Constance blushed. They had been riding for some distance in true Syrian fashion—the horses following each other in single file. It is an arrangement which has its advantages. For example, she had been thinking of Stuart. Some trivial accident, perhaps the mere catching of the sunlight on the gold-woven *cufieh* twisted about his hat, had turned her eyes in his direction. Stuart looked very well on horseback; Fanny had remarked the fact a hundred times, and there was certainly nothing extraordinary in the attention with which Miss Varley watched his movements. Some casual turn of his head, or hand, had

reminded her of the portraits she had seen at Jerusalem. One after the other the faces of his family had risen before her. She remembered them all—the portly father, with the self-satisfied glance ; his pretty sister, his mother, the small boy brother with the pert and comical smile. They might have become her brother and her sister, the girl thought with sudden wonder. No one had ever spoken to her of the Stuarts, and yet, in some subtle fashion, essentially feminine—(one sees evidences of this faculty in the subordinates of all ages)—she had constructed for herself a detailed plan of all their ways and habits. With a curious interest she realised what her own share in that life would have been. She saw herself Jack's wife—his companion—living his life, shaping her own existence to meet his requirements; and not his alone—the



requirements of his family, of his friends. She saw herself transported to another *milieu*, in another atmosphere—a world untroubled by thought, cushioned by respectability, secured against emotion.

She thought of Stuart, of Fanny's counsel. She had reduced her life to an attitude of patient, and loyal, and passionate expectation, until the very force of her purpose had turned against her, and she shrank instinctively from any decisive action. The very readiness with which she was wont to submit her own to another's claim or purpose, gave an inconclusive character to her experience.

But now a puff of summer wind blew gently in her face, sweet with the wooing sweetness of a thousand flowers. She thought of Lawrence. She looked at the figure moving on before her; she looked across the sweep of free wide fields to

the far, serene, unbounded sky. It was with a delicious thrill of triumph Constance remembered that she, too, was free.

"May one ask what you are thinking of?" said Stuart.

Constance blushed. She blushed and smiled, and shook her head. "You are riding the new horse?" she said interrogatively.

"Yes. Shaitan."

"And how do you like him, Jack? Hassan was very enthusiastic."

"Oh, very well. He's not accustomed to this quiet way of travelling yet, I fancy. See how he is fretting at the bit. I shall have to give him a run before long to keep him from pulling my arms off," said Jack, carelessly.

"Look!" cried Constance, pointing with the whip.

Two black and white storks rose heavily from out a field of grain, their long wings flapping and their red legs dangling in the air. They flew slowly, in winding circles, as though anxious to guard or watch over their nest; and a long waving track in the wheat, the quick apparition of a sleek brown head showed where Lione was bounding along in pursuit.

"Hurrah! two to one on the dog!" cried Jack, gaily. With a common impulse they touched their horses and dashed up the hill.

On the level ground beyond, Luigi was trotting sedately onward, his reins fastened to his pommel, the tin cans flashing and shining in the sun. Every now and then the mule would come to a standstill and fall to tearing up huge hasty mouthfuls of wheat by the roots, until her master, missing the tinkle of the bells, would rouse

himself from his sleep with a kick, and send her jogging on again, with much shaking of long ears and rattling of loose tins.

“Mind your horse here,” said Jack, looking back; and as he spoke his own horse shied violently across the road and then stood immovable, trembling and snorting with fear.

“Out of the way there, Luigi! Confound you, man; can’t you move? Don’t you see Miss Varley cannot pass,” said Stuart, impatiently. Lione had doubled again on his track, the birds were hidden in the undulation of the ground.

“It is of no use; we have lost them!” said Constance, looking about her eagerly. The sharp canter had brought the colour to her cheeks and awakened her glance to new life. “Oh, what a pity, I am so afraid Lione will be——”

“By Jove! there he goes now,” said Jack, pointing to a slight rise in the plain far away to the left. “Come on, we can easily cut across again and join the road farther up.”

He dashed the spurs into his horse; cleared the ditch at a bound. Before Luigi could utter a word of remonstrance the two figures were flying fast across the upland.

“Oh, this is glorious!” Constance cried. The horses were quite fresh, and going with a will.

“Give Saïd his head—don’t you see how he likes it?” says Jack, looking back with a laugh.

Down another dip of the ground, up a long hill, and on and on across the short elastic turf to the quick falling cadence of the hoof-beats, with the wind blowing fresh and wild in their faces, as they dash

on faster and faster yet. Hassan has always been proud of his choice of horses, and they do him no discredit to-day, dashing on in free measured movement, the very embodiment of lightness and joyous strength.

“And Lione?” says Constance, at last, drawing rein. The wind has turned her cheeks to deepest rose; the blue eyes shine and laugh with the sheer exultation of life. “And Lione?”

They slacken pace and look about them. All sign of cultivation has vanished far behind. Before them rises a rolling hill—on either side a lonely sweep of undulating ground. They pause a moment and listen. They hear the deep hurried breathing of the horses; a lark is singing somewhere in the profound blue depths of the sky.

“Let us go on to the top of that hill.

Perhaps we may see something. But slowly now; give the horses a chance to rest."

They move on at foot pace. Constance pulls off her gloves, unfastens her large felt hat. "Oh, what a good gallop! and oh, how hot, how hot I am!" she cries gaily. She puts her fingers up to her burning cheeks, and turns, and lets the cool wind lift and ruffle her fine blonde hair. "How lucky that tiresome Hassan was not there to stop us!"

"Yes, we've done it this time and no mistake," says Jack, with a laugh. The hill-top was farther off than it seemed; a quarter of an hour had passed before they reached its summit. Again they looked around them. The low westering sun struck every fold of the ground, every blade of grass with warm and opulent colour. For miles and miles

before, behind, about them the vast green plain, the grass-grown battle-field of a hundred combats, stretched away in silent loneliness.

"I hope you are not tired. We shall have to ride fast to reach camp before dark. I had no idea we had come so far."

"You don't think we ought to go back by the road?"

Stuart shook his head. "Too late. I tell you I had no idea we had ridden such a distance."

"At least I hope you know where camp is?" Constance inquired rather uneasily.

"Well, by George, I should hope I did! A nice fix we should be in otherwise!" said Jack, smiling. "There, look where I am pointing. You see that cleft in the hills? not there—more to the right. That is Jezreel. If it wasn't for that dip in



the ground you could see the village. I made Hassan point it out to me this morning."

"That! why that is miles away," said Constance, following the direction of his hand.

Oh, they could do it in an hour. But it was a good bit, he admitted cheerfully. "Had they not better be moving on?" Miss Varley was afraid that if they were to do any more fast riding she would have to trouble Jack to tighten up the girth. "I'm so sorry to give you the trouble. But I felt something give way at that last jump." He is out of his saddle and at her side before she has finished speaking.

"Shall I hold your horse?"

"Thanks, I think I can manage." He loosens a buckle, lifts a flap, and gives a long drawn whistle of dismay.

"What is the matter?"

"Girth broken. You haven't got a knife, I suppose?"

"No."

"Or a piece of string?" says Jack, despondently, feeling in all his pockets.

"I could give you my necktie?"

She unfastens the ribbon from her throat, and the operation of mending begins. Before it is half over Stuart's horse turns restive, pulls, fidgets, stamps, attempts to kick. "Do let me hold him. You can't do anything with that creature at your elbow," Constance says, and takes the impatient animal by the rein.

It was five minutes or more before the delinquent strap was adjusted to Mr. Stuart's fancy, and meantime, far away behind the darkling hills, the day was slowly dying in a royal splendour of flame. When he looked up from his work a

sudden glory had fallen upon the world. Above their heads and all about them floated a deepening glow of fire, as though the very air itself had turned to rose-red flame.

Constance was still sitting with uncovered head; she was sitting erect in her saddle, looking off at the changing lights with a vague mysterious smile; and to the young man's fancy all the radiance of the sky seemed centring about her face, seemed shining in her deep large eyes, and crowning with a crown of warm red gold the glorious masses of her hair. He stood and looked at her in silence. Saïd had dropped his head, and was cropping the grass at his feet. The other horse was looking anxiously about him, snuffing the air and stamping. The intense light gave a singular air of wildness to his dilated eyes, his backward streaming mane.

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"Shall we go?"

"Go? Oh yes, we will go," Jack repeated, without moving.

She looked up surprised, and met his eyes fixed upon hers. His whole face was changed—transfigured, as it were—by the intensity, the fervent adoration expressed in that glance. His eyes held her captive; the strange resplendent light seemed to shut them out together, to hold them in a world apart; her breath came quick and quicker; it seemed a long while to Constance before he spoke.

"I wish to heaven I had never seen you!"

Constance turned pale. "I—am very sorry——" she began and then stopped short and bent forward, and began stroking her horse's neck.

Jack saw her lips tremble. "Constance!" He put out his hand appeal-

ingly, and checked the motion of her own. "I did not mean that, Constance. Forgive me—won't you forgive me, dearest?"

She lifted her eyes with an effort and looked at him.

"I—— You are so beautiful. By heaven! I don't think I know myself how much I love you," Stuart answered, with an involuntary tightening of the fingers about her wrist.

Mechanically Constance had gathered together her reins; the horses' heads were on a level. It was an opportunity which Shaitan could not neglect. In an instant he had seized his stable-companion by the lips. They both reared—Jack sprang forward—a furious plunge—a struggle—a sudden violent jerk of the head—and Mr. Stuart staggered back on the turf out of the reach of the vicious feet, just in time to save himself, and see his horse galloping

wildly across the plain, the broken halter dragging on the ground behind him.

He got up. He felt his arm. He looked first at the runaway horse, and then at the strap and buckle remaining in his clutch.

"Didn't I tell you that leather was rotten?" he asked, with rueful gravity.

The tone, the expression, the whole situation were too much for Miss Varley's over-taxed nerves. Their eyes met again, and with a common impulse they broke into a peal of inextinguishable laughter.

"No, but really this is no joke," said Jack, checking himself abruptly. "How the deuce are we going to get home? That's the question."

"Yes," said Constance; "how are we going to get home?"

Again they looked about them. From mountain-range to mountain-range the vast

plain lay, one trackless sea of shadow. The light was still lingering on the hill-top ; and now, for one brief instant, the white houses of Nain flashed out with sudden distinctness, and faded slowly away in the folding of the hills. A long distance down the valley a dark object was moving rapidly onward—a riderless horse—relieving sharply against the sky.

“ You don’t think that by galloping Saïd at speed——?”

Mr. Stuart shook his head. “ There is not a horse in the camp who could come near him. And then look at the start he has got—the confounded brute ! ”

“ If he reaches the camp before we do—he seems to be running in that direction—they will be terribly frightened. It will look as though you had met with a bad accident,” said Constance. It was another reason for hastening on their way.

The short Syrian twilight was well-nigh over before they once more reached the level of the plain. "Have you any idea how we can possibly find our way after dark?" Miss Valery asked.

After a moment's deliberation it was decided to follow in the direction of the wind, which was now blowing steadily from the north.

For the first half-hour or so Mr. Stuart had walked along by her side, his hands in his pockets; and both had been inclined to make rather merry over the absurdity of his position. But as the evening grew rapidly darker, when they could no longer distinguish the configuration of the ground, and as Saïd walked more uneasily, showing more and more inclination to start at the lengthening shadows, "You had better let me lead your horse," Jack said. And since then they had hardly exchanged a word.



It was a very dark night. Above their heads rose a solemn starless sky, a clear and sombre dome, marked here and there with moving darker lines of cloud. As their eyes grew more accustomed to the blackness, it was possible to discern the more pronounced inequalities of the pathway, and even the remoter indefinite outline of the hills. All about them was darkness, silence—a sense of mysterious and illimitable space. Once, before they knew it, they found themselves traversing a narrow field of wheat. The ripe and restless grain rustled and whispered all about them in the darkness, and Mr. Stuart started and peered anxiously around.

“Provided we don’t run foul of any of those Bedaween,” the young man thought, with rising anxiety. He glanced up at his companion, then hesitated, and checked himself as he was beginning to speak.

As the silence deepened between them, a singular fancy had taken possession of Constance. The darkness, the profound stillness, the monotonous motion of her horse, served at once to soothe and stimulate her imagination. Naturally fearless, her blind feminine trust in Stuart's prowess, her equally feminine incapacity for appreciating different degrees of danger, prevented her from even suspecting the possible peril of this wild night ride. She looked about her, but it was only the better to contemplate the veiled mysterious beauty of the night. She lifted up her eyes—it was to see if not a star were shining in all that vast and shadow-stricken sky. A strange, a solemn emotion, possessed and filled her soul. She sat erect, motionless, feeling herself a mere passive atom borne onward and onward into the night; but her spirit seemed freed and attuned to the very wildness of the wind.

The myriad small preoccupations of these last weeks faded and fell away from her like a dream. For the first time for many days she felt alone, alone in spirit; and with a wild and fervent impulse her heart turned and clung to the very thought of Lawrence. She looked about her; the vast dim night was silent and calm and mysterious as the grave. A deep and passionate impatience—the very sickness of hope long deferred—surged in a bitter flood about her overburdened soul.

“You are tired, Constance. I am sure I heard you sigh,” said Jack, tenderly.

“Yes I am—tired,” Constance answered. It was hard to keep her voice from trembling as she spoke.

And now Said started, quickened his weary footsteps, and then paused and stood still.

“I think, by Jove! I think we have

struck the road at last," said Stuart; and at the same moment Constance turned her head and broke into a low exclamation of wonder and delight. For now the whole western sky was flooded with pale and doubtful radiance, and away behind a craggy hill-top they saw the growing splendour of the slowly-rising moon.

"Yes, this is the right road, surely. We can't be very far from camp, I think." He hesitated and thought a moment. "Yes, I shall risk it," he muttered between his teeth. "Hold your horse well in hand, Constance, and don't be startled. I am going to fire a signal, on the chance Hassan may hear."

He walked a few steps down the road and took out his revolver. Three shots followed each other in quick succession, and seemed to startle the very depths of the silent night. And then again all was

quiet, save the quick, anxious panting of the frightened horse. They waited several minutes ; gradually Saïd grew quiet again, and yet no answering signal came.

“Well, it was a chance,” said Stuart, uneasily. “Hark !” They strained their ears to listen.

“I am sure—yes—I am sure I hear hoof-beats,” said Constance, almost in a whisper.

And now it was easy to see that Saïd, too, had heard them ; he started, pricked up his ears, and snuffed eagerly at the wind.

“They are several horsemen. They are galloping fast. They are coming this way. I can hear them quite distinctly,” said Constance, with rising excitement. “Oh Jack, are you not glad ? Hassan has found us at last. Don’t you hear them, Jack ? It is Hassan !”

"No," said Mr. Stuart. He comes closer to her and stands beside her horse. "I hate to have to tell you of it, Constance"—the words came out with reluctance—"but I must. It is not Hassan. The men are coming the wrong way. Hush!" he says, with sudden emphasis, and seizes Saïd by the bridle.

"But, Jack——"

"The Bedaween," says Stuart, in a warning whisper. The strange horsemen are coming on at full gallop; already they can distinguish a small confused mass moving rapidly across the plain. On the farther side from where they stand a high bank shelters and conceals the road. For a moment the pursuers seem pressing farther on. They hold their breath in silence, crouching back into the shade. But as the strange horses pass abreast, Saïd starts forward with a low whinny of recognition.

The enemy halts ; wheels about ; a moment's parley ; and then as Stuart walks boldly forward, a single figure detaches itself from the group, and at the same moment the young man sees a long tufted spear relieving sharply against the low-hanging moon, and hears a menacing, guttural voice challenging his right to pass.

## CHAPTER IV.

BY THE WATERS OF GALILEE.

STUART knew one word of Arabic; he used it. He walked deliberately forward, keeping his eyes fixed upon his interlocutor. "Backshish," he said, with conciliatory intonation. The Bedawy halted. Stuart took another step forward. The Bedawy wheeled about his horse, lowered his lance. Jack's fingers fell carelessly upon the handle of the pistol in his belt. "Backshish; Jezreel?" he repeated, in an encouraging voice. Then with deep conviction of the necessity of saying something, and a des-



perate relapse into the vernacular : " I don't suppose you want to get into trouble, my friend," he remarked cheerfully. " That's a very neat little affair of yours, that lance, I daresay ; but if you would kindly keep it rather more out of the conversation——"

The full moon had risen high enough to outline his adversary in sharpest silhouette against the sky. He saw the man rise in his stirrups and look about him. He saw the light catch and run down the thin black length of spear. The Bedawy turned in his saddle ; a wild hoarse cry of command ; a sudden move forward of all the waiting horsemen ; a pause ; a short parley. Two muffled figures detached themselves from the group and rode slowly forward.

" Now, don't let your friends excite themselves with too much riding," said

Stuart, recklessly. He spoke loud enough for Constance to hear him. "But, by Jove! I'd give something to be well out of this," the young man thought. The reinforcement was approaching with deliberate composure. It looked decidedly unpleasant.

Another moment, and the foremost rider had halted directly in front of Jack. He halted, leaned forward, threw back the folds of his long loose Arab cloak. To Stuart's inexpressible astonishment he laughed; he held out his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Stuart? I'm very glad to see you again; but, if it's a fair question, I should like to know what the devil you are doing here?" remarked this midnight assassin.

And five minutes later found them all riding on together along the Jezreel road. It was only a mile or so to camp; the Bedawy guide could walk; Stuart

should take his horse. The fellow deserved some punishment for having frightened Miss Varley, Mr. Ferris averred politely. "Yes; we heard your shots. We thought someone was getting into trouble," the gentleman riding beside Constance remarked. "You will allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Davenant?" said Ferris. In a few words Mr. Davenant explained the situation.

"I persuaded Ferris to come across by night. The men wanted to wait for the moon. But I thought it would be a finer sensation to see it rising from out the darkness and from behind the hills. It was really a very happy inspiration of Mr. Stuart's—that firing. Our men declared we were attacked by Bedaween. It gave us a fine dramatic effect."

"Dramatic? It was dramatic enough, certainly," said Constance.

"But you were frightened, perhaps? Ah, you will appreciate the value of the sensation better when you look back at it. It was a point, don't you see? a situation; an accent. And next to having a great sorrow—which, of course, is the finest experience—I think accenting one's existence, multiplying one's emotions, heightening, intensifying the quality of one's sensations——"

Miss Varley turned and looked at her companion.

He had taken off his hat. The moonlight streamed full and clear upon his face. That face was almost an anachronism. It was like one of Holbein's portraits; a pale, large-featured, individual; a peculiar, an interesting countenance, of singularly mild yet ardent expression. Mr. Davenant was very young—probably not more than one or two and twenty; but he looked

younger. He wore his hair rather long, thrown back, and clustering about his neck like the hair of a mediæval saint. He spoke with rapidity, in a low voice, with peculiarly distinct enunciation; he spoke like a man who made a study of expression. He listened like one accustomed to speak.

“But a great sorrow, Mr. Davenant——”

“Ah, that is the supreme experience, of course; overpowering sorrow suppresses civilisation; it links a man to all the eternal verities of life. If I were a mother,” said the young man, fervently, “if I were a mother, I should wish to have at least one of my sons meet with a tragic, a heroic death. I should wish him to be slain in battle. There would be something so sublime in one’s despair. Great sorrow—perhaps great joy——”

The horse stumbled and recovered himself cleverly.

"There he goes ! Davenant never will attend to what he is doing. He's been off twice to-night already," said Ferris, with a laugh.

"Can't ride ?"

"Oh, forgets all about it ! Thinks of something he's been reading, and mistakes his horse for a bookcase for all I know."

"What is he—English ?"

"Oh yes ; an Oxford man. Young Oxford, and all that sort of thing, don't you know ? A sort of early Christian brought down to date, and adapted—like a restored church. But a capital fellow for all that. We've been travelling together for the last six weeks, and the more I know him the more I—— Davenant ! I say, Davenant !"

"Well ?"

"That's the turn there—to the left."

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Davenant. He went on talking to Constance. He was speaking to her of Greece, of Athens—the city of the early morning—rising in the cool, pale, steady light of dawn, a new Aphrodite, from out the lapping circle of the waves. He spoke to her of the Parthenon, the one temple—not a building—a temple, as complete, as personal as a statue. And that first sight of the Acropolis, the delicate naked columns rising up in the morning sunshine: "It was like coming upon some white Greek goddess. It made one feel——"

"Hurrah! I see a light. Yes, there are the tents!" cried Stuart, pressing forward. And there indeed was camp, and loud-mouthed welcome from Lione, and all the rumour and excitement of return.

"Hassan is still out looking for you.

Oh Constance, I have been so anxious ! I have been quite wild ; ask Tom.. And Shaitan has come home without his saddle ; I thought I should faint when I saw him coming in. Tom wanted to go and look for you, but of course I would not let him go. I cannot endure to be left alone," said Fanny, sinking back into her chair. "Thank you, Mr. Ferris ; oh, never mind the cushion now. I am sure," she said, smiling very sweetly, and leaning her graceful little head against the chair, "I am sure that you fortunate people who have no nerves——"

"But perhaps Mr. Ferris will stay and dine with us, Fanny. Oh, your tents are close by, next door in fact. It won't be any trouble to you, and I'm sure we shall be very happy to have you stay—and your friend," the Major interposed eagerly.



And after dinner this eagerness was explained. "I have not brought anything with me really. That portfolio? oh, there is nothing much in that," Mr. Ferris had answered with some reluctance. He had been turning over a pile of the Major's drawings for the last half-hour, with civil and appropriate commentary. And Davenant was never of any use on an emergency like this.

But presently, as Mrs. Thayer was rapturously and quickly examining the contents of the portfolio: "Those are worth looking at. I had forgotten I had them with me," he said, and leaned over and laid some sheets of drawing-paper on the table. "Designs for two companion pictures—the Plain of Esdraelon, you see. They are by—by a friend of mine; a man I know in Damascus."

"Ah yes; I see. Not your own work

then," said Fanny, and passed them by with charming *nonchalance*.

"Will you show them to me?" said Constance.

Both were unfinished sketches. The first was a study of a woman—a low-browed Syrian peasant-woman—standing in the doorway, one strong arm thrust behind her, dragging together the black folds of the tent. A little child was clinging, unheeded, by her side. Beyond the figure stretched the level fields, and all her face was lighted up with the strange glow of an unseen sunset—that thin, common face, transfigured, grown terrible and wild with recollection of past and ineffaceable horror.

And underneath the drawing was written :  
"And Sisera said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and

say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt answer, No."

Constance drew a long breath. She looked up. "I like it," she said simply.

"And this," said Ferris—"will you know what this one means?"

It was the same low-lying plain, by night. A wild tumultuous sky, torn with sharp lines of stormy light; a dark hill-ridge; the uncertain outline of a tall muffled figure, "taller than any other of the people from the shoulders and upward;" and, farther on, two other shadows stealing through the night. And next to it, roughly divided off by a mere charcoal scratch across the paper, another study of the principal figure. A man's face, looking out against the dawn—large noble features, with eyes shadowed by the falling folds of the Arab headdress, with proud and patient mouth; a young and kingly face, grown pale and

wan with suffering and great weariness, and strange foreshadowing of doom.

George Ferris was very much pleased with the girl's manner of examining this work. Hitherto he had not paid very much attention to her perhaps; but now he turned and favoured her with a perfectly respectful and perfectly exhaustive survey. Few details escape the interested eye of an artist; but for all that, the next morning he became convinced that there had been still another discovery to make.

It was still very early in the morning. The fresh and dewy fields were hardly shining yet in the first level rays of the sun, a thin blue smoke was only now beginning to float above the double line of tents, and the air was yet cool with the coolness of night.

But lower down the hill there was plenty of sound and life and confusion—a noisy

clattering circle of baggage-mules, jangling with bells and gay with coloured trappings, crowding thirstily about the flower-choked well; and nearer camp, a long line of horses were being driven up the road. The young men stood and criticised them as they trotted by.

"That wasn't a bad nag of yours—the one you lent me last night, Ferris."

"The sheikh has a better one, though. Those fellows always get the best of everything," said Ferris, philosophically.

"Hollo! why, they are saddling Miss Varley's horse already! We seem to be going to make an early start of it this morning," said Jack.

They walked over through the wet grass to where the grooms were bringing out the saddles.

"The fact is, Hassan, you ought to be most uncommonly obliged to me for not

having massacred you in cold blood last night," Stuart remarked conversationally.

Hassan seemed very much offended.

"Well, sir, I've been dragoman thirty years, sir; and my father, he dragoman before me——"

"Oh, was he, though? That explains. I could not for the life of me imagine where you had got hold of such a precious lot of rotten old saddles; but of course, if they're family relics—— I say, just tell that man to mind what he's about, will you? Those girths are not half properly strapped."

"Miss Constance knows how to ride," said Hassan sulkily.

"Miss Constance shall not run the chance of being thrown while *I* can help it," said the young man coolly. "And what is that?"

It was a bit of black ribbon hanging down from Miss Varley's saddle.

"Oh, I see. The thing I used last night to mend your jolly old strap," he said, indifferently. He hesitated a moment, patted the horse on the neck, unfastened the ribbon, and put it deliberately in his pocket.

"A wise provision against future contingences is the test of the sage," observed Ferris, gravely, knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"Oh, I don't know ; it may be useful," said Jack, in a very offhand manner.

Mr. Ferris smiled. He had drawn his conclusions.

And, still in the early morning, they set out for Nazareth. To-day, for the first time, the crimson and white and gold of the flowers was relieved by patches of tall pale primroses. And then, beyond the stony mountain-path, they came upon the ancient cacti hedges girdling about the town. So old are they, so massive and

impenetrable is the close rampart of their flat-palmed branches, they seem to have been there from the very beginning of things, and to have started from the mother nursery of some elder world. Like some unholy genii—cruel, inactive, unfamiliar—they stare weirdly out at the life defiling before them century after century. They bear an uncanny fruit the native children relish. “But then, have we not seen them eating grass?” asks Fanny, with a yawn. It has been a long ride, and Mrs. Thayer is tired. They leave the bleak and stony defile behind them, they climb the road, they come full upon this small gray village spread upon the hillside; and still they can feel nothing but its insignificance, its barrenness, its dirt.

And later on, with the tents pitched on high ground near the olive-grove—looking down upon the convents, upon the church-



roofs, the huddled houses, the long blank road that seemed to be leading nowhere—this same impression endures.

And it is only at night, when the shadows have massed and simplified the broken outlines of the small pale hills—it is only at night, when a yellow sunset is dying away behind the distant mountains; when the voices of the women by the Virgin's Fountain come floating softly up through the silent gray evening, and the air is sweet with the smell of the small common flowers in the grass—it is only then, I say, that they can feel any charm in melancholy abject Nazareth.

Once more they started in the early morning. Once more they saw the Mediterranean—a deep blue line between the mountain summits of the farther range—once more they rode across the plains. And what a lovely dream is spring in that

most lovely country ! The flower-covered slopes rose up before them, breaking in billows of colour against the tender sky ; white cranes started from the tall grass through which they waded ; from far-off woods the cuckoo's voice came thin and floating on the wind.

And all day long they rode in strange and silent solitude. From Nazareth to Galilee is but deserted space. Only, at long intervals, you see or pass some lonely village, perched like a well-guarded nest on the edge of the precipice ; and then again for miles and miles of sunny silence it is as though some mighty storm-wind had swept all life away—with nature left, the only sovereign of space.

The afternoon was waning when they came in sight of the Sea of Galilee. The great flanks of the hills dropped down, somewhat abruptly, to the lake. The

whole character of the landscape was large and simple and bare ; no trees breaking the great flowing lines of the hills. After a somewhat rapid descent—too rapid for Fanny's heavy palanquin—they came upon the flat stretch of sand reaching to the old walls, the crumbling towers of Tiberias. The old city has shrunk to a few squalid huts, rising brokenly above the fields of burning bloom ; and without the curiosity of passing through it the little cavalcade pushed on to where the camp had been pitched by the shore of the lake, some half-hour's ride beyond the town.

It was a memorable ride to Constance. It was by Galilee ! The sad gray water lapped the shore ; the Moabite hills rose low against a sad gray sky ; the air was a little chilly—just enough to make you shrink into yourself. They were all tired ; no fund of animal spirits was left, and

precisely on this account—because physical being was so quiescent—mind and spirit rose unobstructed by the mere accidents of travel, and were left to brood, as it were, over the few great facts that consecrate the hill-slopes and the Sea of Galilee.

Constance looked about her on that quiet evening, over the idle wavelets along the lonely shore, to the cold shade of the nearer hills, thrusting their rocky flanks into the very water. She tried to realise the serene presence of the Galilean—the simple fishermen—the storm on the lake—the sleeping master—the disciple sinking in the waves. She thought of the eager multitudes pouring out of that crowded city where now only the flowers of the field flaunted and flamed above the ruined walls. An infinite sadness filled her soul—the sadness of youth, of nature, of religion

—the helpless stretching out of feeble hands. She looked abstracted; her impassioned wide-eyed glance wandered from shore to shore, from sea to sky, unmindful of her companions. She felt for the moment alone. Could she hear that voice? could her spirit know the presence of that Divine Goodness who walked and taught in the shadow of these everlasting hills, by the waters of that plashing sea? The very doors of her being seemed open to all the infinite possibilities of faith.

It was but for a moment, but in such moments the soul grows. Touched with tenderness, athirst for something to satisfy it, exalted by poetry and religion, she stood by the waters of Galilee.

## CHAPTER V.

### SCHÖN-ROHTRAUT.

THE lake-shore was covered with long white rows of tents.

“Oh, I think we shall find a great many people here to-day,” said Fanny, with a pleased expression in her eyes.

She drew back the curtain of the litter; picked up a book that had fallen; settled her cuff; put her hat straight upon her head. “If you will take away those flowers from the mules’ harness, Tom? I don’t want to look like a picnic.”

Some ladies were crossing the beach

to their encampment. They looked up curiously as the new comers came in sight ; and, even at this distance, there was something familiar in the aspect of the stout gray dresses, the strong and serviceable white umbrellas they carried in their hands.

“ It is—it must be—Constance, it is the Vaughan-Smythes ! ” said Fanny, springing to her feet. And then there followed much hand-shaking and loud recognition and greeting by the shore.

“ But you must have travelled very fast to have overtaken us ? ” Mrs. Vaughan-Smythe remarked that evening to Mrs. Thayer. “ As for ourselves, Mahmoud has turned out to be a perfect treasure so far. We have enjoyed our trip so much. We have saved twelve hours already. Twelve hours, without counting the three Sundays, since we left Jerusalem. You make it a

point to stop over every Sunday, of course ? ”

And Fanny smiled amiably in reply.

“ Oh, we have had such adventures ! ” she said, in her clear rapid treble ; “ oh, dear Mrs. Smythe, if you could only have been with us yesterday ! ”

“ Yes ; it is very interesting, of course. We have been here ever since four o’clock. We wanted to come early to secure the best places and make sure of having fish for breakfast to-morrow. Of course that is what one thinks of first at Galilee—the fish,” Miss Adela Smythe was saying to Constance.

“ And when did you leave Nablous then, Mr. Stuart ? ” the pretty sister asked Jack.

“ Nablous ? Let me see. This is Friday—what, Saturday, is it ? Ah, well then, we left Nablous four days ago. We got there on a Monday morning.”



quite a little congregation this morning. Brought your camp-stools with you, I hope? That's right—that's right," said Mr. Smythe, weightily, holding out his large white hand.

Mr. Smythe was a large portly man, of severe aspect and indefinite mind. But this latter fact was of the less consequence to him, possibly, that it did not prevent his possessing large regular features, regular whiskers, a lofty shining forehead, and a large sonorous voice—an imposing combination of attributes which had long since caused him to adopt a parliamentary career. He had the reputation of being very popular in the House.

Miss Adela greeted the new comers with momentary enthusiasm. "Oh, did you have fish for breakfast?" she asked, eagerly.

"No," said Constance, smiling.

"No? Only fancy! Why, our dragoon got up before daylight to secure it; he said he had bought it all."

"Ah, Mahmoud is a sharp fellow," said her father with decorous exultation.

And presently the service began.

From the place where Constance sat she could see the rippling play of the water, foaming and breaking about a bed of small shells, worn thin and white by the waves; and, far across the lake, floated a vision of solemn mountain summits, lifting one above the other, crowned with the radiant morning light. Involuntarily her attention wandered. She glanced about the room. She caught Stuart's eye, and a half smile passed over her lips at sight of his sleek brushed head and general expression of decorous melancholy. She looked at the doorway where Mahmoud sat in respectful discomfort. "We were

determined to have a Christian dragoman for the Holy Land," said Mrs. Vaughan-Smythe, "and we got him quite as cheap." And then a wistful look stole into the beautiful eyes gazing out at that peaceful sea.

It was now about ten o'clock. The thin gray mist had lifted from the lake, a cool light breeze ruffled the water to a deeper blue; through the voice of the reader she could hear, quite plainly, the low wash of the waves upon the shore. Someone proposed a walk after the service. There were more people out upon the beach, and they strolled by more than one family group picking flowers for remembrance, or busily collecting shells. But presently they had left the line of tents behind them, and now they entered on a long and lonely stretch of sand.

Perhaps it was this very loneliness which

prompted them to look with something more than ordinary curiosity at a tall and solitary figure, dressed in black, seated upon a rock, her head resting upon her hand, gazing out to sea. There was a great expression of sadness on the pale fine features and in the listless pose.

“What a beautiful face, and how unhappy,” said Constance, with quick sympathy.

“It is Lady Janet Blank. No, I do not know her—personally. She has had a great deal of trouble with her husband, I hear; and I fancy there is something, ah—something rather *fishy* about her,” said Mrs. Vaughan-Smythe, with a deprecatory smile.

“Ah,” said Fanny, gravely; “ah, really. How very painful. So glad you warned me of it. Constance—Miss Varley—was speaking to her little girl only this morn-

ing. And one can never be too careful, you know."

"Poor thing!" said Constance, in her gentlest voice. She looked up at the brilliant gladness of the day, and back at the lonely figure on the shore of that sea where the weak, the helpless, the sinking had heard the voice of a Friend. "Poor thing, I should like to ask her——"

"My dear Constance!"

"But really, Miss Varley, you know——"

"What, don't you mean to stop at Magdala, Mr. Stuart? Only fancy! Why, I would not miss Magdala for anything."

"Because of Mary Magdalene? But surely wasn't there something rather *fishy* about her?" inquired Constance, gravely.

Miss Smythe looked up in genuine surprise.

"Oh, really, you Americans are so very odd, you know."

And her father quite agreed with her.

“A very worthy people, my dear; young—very young—but worthy. I will not say—I should hesitate to say—they are a nation without a future,” said that gentleman magnanimously; “but there is a shocking spirit of levity about the true American; an entire absence of weight, you mark me—of weight—which—ah, which—— They are a glib people, I don’t deny it, but essentially slight, my dear, essentially slight. They have no real conversation; not what I call conversation,” said Mr. Smythe.

He spoke with some asperity, and his words were followed by appropriate silence. It was only after a long pause that his wife looked up from her book.

“Very good dinner we had to-day, my dear,” she observed thoughtfully.

“Very, my dear, very,” said Mr.

Vaughan-Smythe in his most sonorous tones.

It was early the next morning when Constance came out of her tent. The weather had changed for the worse. There was a wan and chilly light on the mountains now, the air was cold and still, and the only sound in the morning was the moan of the gray and restless sea. But even if the young day came in pale and colourless, there was plenty of light and resolution in the face of the girl as she clambered about the rocks, or sat down on the sands by Lione and filled her lap with flowers.

This was how the Major found her, coming up with young Stuart from their morning plunge in the lake. He stopped to look at her with a certain pleasure in his face.

"Well, you look wide awake enough,"

he observed approvingly. "Fanny not dressed yet, I suppose? Well, I will go and call her. Now mind you don't keep breakfast waiting, Constance, there's a good girl," he said, walking off through the tall wet grass.

"Do you intend not to say 'good-morning' to me at all, then," demanded Mr. Stuart.

Constance smiled.

"I'm extremely happy this morning," she said inconsequentially. "Now—at last—I feel as though we were really going to Damascus. I shall get some letters there. I shall get two, perhaps three, letters from my father——"

"But you haven't said 'good-morning,' to me yet," said Jack.

She had been busy fastening a great yellow marigold in Lione's collar, but now she lifted up her face and he could



see the careless friendly look in her eyes and the faint fresh colour the sea wind had brought to her cheek.

"This Syrian air must disagree with me ; I believe I am growing rude," she answered gravely. 'Good-morning,' Mr. Stuart. There, that is the great disadvantage of society — people are always making comparisons. Now, if you had not spent your afternoon yesterday flirting with that pretty Miss Smythe, why, perhaps you might never have discovered how bad even my manners can be."

"Miss Smythe !"

"Oh, Miss Smythe is very pretty. I think she is a very nice girl," said Constance. "I like English girls ; I like——"

"You like talking nonsense, I think," he interrupted coolly.

"Well, at least I don't deny my tastes,"

she answered frankly. "But, really now, I don't see why you should call it nonsense ; I really don't see why you should not flirt with Miss Smythe, or fall in love with Miss Smythe, if——"

She had been speaking almost at random, but now she checked herself suddenly, and there was an expression of embarrassment in her eyes. She glanced up timidly at her companion. The young man had turned away his head. There was a curious look on his face as he stood biting his lip and staring at the pale and restless water.

"No ; I never supposed you did see it," he answered shortly.

It seemed a long way back to the tents.

The shores of the lake are absolutely deserted. As they rode, an hour later, by the ruined battlements of Tiberias—

only invested now by scarlet poppies or the waving grass—a few miserable old Jews crawled out of their hovels to gaze at the travellers, then, with some mysterious murmur of imprecation, slunk back to their hiding-holes. Not a house was to be seen on either shore; nothing but deep misty ravines, filled with shifting blue shadows; no sound but the sullen beating of the surf.

As the path wound higher and higher they could see, at every bend of the leafy road, the wide gray loneliness of the mountain-girdled sea. And once—quite suddenly—they came upon a wandering caravan of pilgrims—men and women and children, clad in strange and beautiful garments: a sudden, brilliant burst of vivid colour and gaily-caparisoned horses and flashing arms. They passed each at foot-pace in the narrow pathway. And

then a sudden silence fell upon the noisy train ; the men looked warily to their merchandise, the women folded themselves more tightly in their veils ; it was the silent negation of an alien race.

And now indeed they seemed entering into the very heart of solitude ; for now they had left behind them the mournful swamps of Magdala, its ruined mill and the shallow brawling river, where all day long the clustering oleanders flaunt their frail rosy beauty in the sun ; and on and on they rode by silent paths, through long wild stretches of leafy solitudes, or out into the empty open fields between the yellow primroses and the soft silver-gray of the sky.

And on the second day they reached the swamps of Huleh. A primitive grandeur marks the long swelling lines, the mountain barrier of that desolate unclaimed land.

Once, towards evening, they came upon a camp of Bedaween. The small "black tents of Kidar," looked like black bats flattened against the ground. The men were in the pastures with the cattle; a low-browed woman, with shining silver ornaments about her wrists and hair, offered to sell them some milk as they passed through the village; some thin, brown-skinned children sprang from the road and fled with shrill wild outcry to the shelter of the tents; and gaunt and famished pariah dogs pursued them with loud throated menace far into the open fields. And then one night came the first revelation of Mount Hermon, rising in snow-crowned solitude, far off against the roseate sky. They were camping beside a nameless lake, where big brown buffaloes trooped slowly down through the sedge to drink, and the reedy shore was for a moment transfigured

into a network of gold by the magical weaving of sunset. Then night crept over the land—chill, homeless night, with the wailing of wind and the sense of desolation.

It was the next day they reached Banias.

But even in this brief interval, a change had come over the spirit of the little party. As Constance said, it seemed at last that they were really going to Damascus; something of the city's restraint made itself felt. And now, indeed, they could already look forward to the end of this free and careless journeying, and more than one of them secretly questioned what that end should be. It is true that when Fanny attempted to give these questions a more tangible expression, she met with but small success.

“How can I tell you what I mean to do, Fanny? What do I know of it myself? You take it for granted that I

am thinking always of what—of what other people would like,” the girl said, somewhat bitterly; “but is there nothing ever coming to me out of life? Am I never to think, to expect, to live, for myself?”

It was a settled conviction of Mrs. Thayer’s that Constance was incapable of very deep emotion.

“You ought to marry some man with plenty of money, who would be very devoted to you and very indulgent; someone who could give you a good position,” she argued seriously. “All those romantic and sentimental notions are quite out of place with your character, Constance. You’re the dearest girl in the world, you know, and I love you dearly; but I don’t think you will ever break your heart over anybody much. And really, Constance, with your good sense—Tom always says you have more good sense than any woman

he knows—and when you think of your father at home and all those children, and you with your habits and tastes, I don't know anyone who needs to make a good marriage more than yourself, dear child," concluded Fanny, with unsparing frankness.

The girl was walking by the side of the palanquin, but now she turned her head away, and Mrs. Thayer could only see the nervous trembling of her hands.

"There is Aunt Van, to be sure," continued that prudent little person; "of course if you have really decided never to marry, Aunt Van will have to do something for you, I suppose. I daresay she would do it, even after that Stuyvesant affair. But living with Aunt Van! Why, surely, Constance——"

"It had not come to that yet. No, not yet;" the girl answered proudly, lifting up her eyes. And then, with



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"It had not come to that yet. No, not yet;" the girl answered proudly, lifting up her eyes. And then, with

sudden change of manner: "Oh Fanny," she said passionately, "be good to me; let me alone! I know—I know everything you would say, dear, and it is all true, and you are good to say it, only—— We have four days left, haven't we? and then Damascus, and Aunt Van. But those four days belong to me," said Constance.

It was not like her usual way of speaking. When Mrs. Thayer thought it over afterwards, she sighed and shook her head dubiously. There was something more here than met the eye, the little lady thought—something she could not understand.

And meanwhile they were climbing up to Banias. Climbing to the source of the Jordan, by sunny paths and through pale fields of wheat; by myrtle groves, and hoary old olives, lightening-shattered and gray. There was a delicate, continuous

sound of running water in the air ; marble columns and many a fallen capital were lying on the ground, deep hidden in tall weeds ; and far above their heads, high on the mountain's slope, the crumbling citadel lifted its ruined towers.

And now winding about the hillside, they pushed their way through a leafy covert of thorn and myrtle, to the secret woodland paths. Frail white cyclamen grew in abundance in these moist recesses, and rank buttercups thrust their yellow blossoms through the branches to catch and hold each wandering gleam of sunshine. At last, pushing their way through the luxuriant branching, they came upon a little open glade where the stream widened to a pool. An oak-tree stretched its branches clear across the river ; beneath its shade the thicket drew back, leaving a little open space of smooth green turf.

And now the horses stood motionless, drinking in the water with the deep-drawn breathing of content. The little river foamed and splashed about their feet, to disappear some ten yards off under a tangle of blossom-whitened boughs.

Here, in the home of the great god Pan, they seemed to have discovered the most secret of his haunts. As Constance looked about her, the leaves overhead rustled suddenly as though stirred by the white hands of some dryad, "with a face like spring," and the girl smiled to fancy that by lifting up her eyes she could meet the mischievous startled gaze of some belated faun, or hear in the lift and fall of the splashing water the low laughter of the nymphs hidden amongst sharp-flowering rushes. And then as she looked about her she was struck with a sudden sense of the curious silence of the place. There

was not the sound of a bird's song among the branches, not the flutter of a bird's wing across the blue. She listened. A sudden cloud passed over the April sky ; the flower-crowned laurels flung their white arms wildly in the air ; a sudden gust of wind shook all the sturdy branches of the oak, and hushed itself with a shivering sigh among the reeds. And through the sobbing of the water came a wild lament—Pan, Pan is dead !

It was at Banias that they again fell in with Ferris—at Banias and under the trees. The night was warm and still. They sat by the brink of the shadowy river, rushing wildly down from its sacred cave beside the ruined shrines ; they watched it for a moment, flowing thin and clear adown that marble stairway which the footsteps of many a worshipper had pressed—they watched it, hastening downward



In a rough and broken fashion he tried to tell them how one day—there came one day when they rested in the oak-forest, and how beautiful Rohtraut laughed. “Why do you look at me,” she asks, “why do you look at me so longingly? Nay, if you have the courage you may kiss my beautiful lips.” “Be silent, my heart, be still!”

And here was it only fancy that the trees whispered together more loudly through the windless night, and the torrent paused to listen in the moonlight, as he told them how the young man trembled, and how he thought “she has allowed it,” and how he kissed the beautiful girl upon her mouth? And then they ride so silently homeward, and there is wild delight in the young man’s heart. “And though they made you into an empress to-day, what do I care for that? The thousand leaves

in the wood they know it—they know that I have kissed her beautiful mouth.

*Schweig stille, mein Herz, schweig still !”*

“Ah !” said Davenant, slowly, “it is one of those songs that die away from their music. Do you remember Schubert’s music, Miss Varley, and all the wild longing and passionate desire of that accompaniment ? I never knew but one person who sang it well.”

“It is a man’s song, I suppose,” said Stuart. “I have heard of it once before.”

“I know a friend of Ferris’s who sings it,” the young man answered carelessly, “a countryman of yours, by - the - way, and an artist. His name—you may have heard of him, perhaps—is Lawrence—Denis Lawrence.”

He happened to be looking at Constance as he spoke, and even in the uncertain

light he could see the startled look in her face.

"Perhaps you know him then?" he said.

The girl drew farther back into the shadow.

"I have not seen him, no, not for a long time," she said, with an effort; and it was not Davenant alone who noticed the steady suppression in her voice.

"Ah, well, Lawrence is a capital fellow," said Ferris, lightly. "I know him very well. We were together at the Beaux Arts, in Paris, once; I am going to meet him now—in a day or two. What," said the young man with some surprise, "is it possible you did not know that Lawrence is at Damascus?"

And all night long the river flashed, and foamed, and murmured, beneath the whispering trees; and white stars came,

and shone, and faded, until the timid dawn awoke in the east; the topmost branches of the aspen blushed rosy-red, a bird called to its mate rapturously through the silence, and the river laughed with new joy for the new day.

And the desire of her heart had come to Constance.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DAWN.

ONCE already that night Hassan had been awakened by the fancied sound of footsteps prowling about the camp. Once already, when he had gone out hurriedly into the darkness, his camels'-hair abbas folded stiffly about him, and the wind ruffling his thin gray hair, it was only to see the tranquil row of white tents shining peacefully in the moonlight, and to hear the vague sighing of the trees. But now, as he looked cautiously around him, something moved out there in the

shadow ; a dark figure was coming slowly towards him, lounging about in the moonlight, its hands in its pockets and a cigar in its mouth.

"What's the matter, Hassan? Anything up?" Stuart demanded in a low tone.

The young man laughed to scorn any suggestion that harm might come to him of this ghostly wandering.

"You go to sleep now and let me alone. Catch the fever? That's a likely story! and what the devil does it matter to you if I do? I tell you what it is, Hassan: the care of this family is getting to be too much for your brain. Now go to bed, there's a good fellow, and don't bother. You'd better go to sleep. This is a capital place for sleeping, you know. I stumbled over one of your guards a moment ago, and I'm blessed if the fellow even winked," he said good-humouredly.

He walked down into the darkness, and stared at the swirling stream.

"She cares for me—she cares for me as I do for *that*," he thought, and tossed his cigar into the water, and saw the spark of fire sputter and go out.

The short summer night was well-nigh over; a light mist floated above the river; already the low moon paled against the paling sky.

"And those other fellows," he went on, thinking savagely; and there was perhaps none the less bitterness in his reflections that they took this unsentimental form; "those other fellows, with their pictures and poetry and stuff: is there one of them who knows her as I know her, or who would do what I would do for her, for a word—a look—anything? They say I haven't any sentiment. Well, I don't understand German—that's true enough; but

can't I be as spooney over a girl as any other fellow?"

He thought of other episodes in his experience. But which one of those girls could ever be compared to her? he asked himself, with cool ingratitude. Each little familiar trick and turn of expression rose up distinctly before him. There was one particular look of hers when anything had pleased her, a look that came into her eyes——

He stood there so long that a bird began singing in the branches; there was a deepening glimmer of gold behind the trees, and of a sudden the river leaped and danced and glistened in the sun. He turned his head. Here—here she was, Constance herself, coming through the long grass to greet him, with spring in her face and white hands full of flowers.

A happy inspiration came to Stuart.



“Oh no, the others are not awake yet,” he answered, somewhat eagerly. “Look here, Constance, suppose we don’t wait for them? Let us, you and I, go up to the fountain together—Pan’s Fountain, don’t you know? There will be such a mob of people when the others are all there,” he suggested artfully; “and I know you don’t like mobs.”

Constance laughed.

“I am ready. I am ready for anything this morning,” she said confidentially; and she looked at him with all the gladness of life in her face.

They went up. It was a steep and rugged path beneath the cliff, and the stones were still slippery with dew. The wet myrtle branches spattered a shower of raindrops and white petals in their faces as they pushed their way past; it would be hours before the sun entered these leafy

thickets; but already high overhead the sheer wall of red granite burned redly in the morning light. And now they had reached the goatherd's terrace, and before them, deep in the heart of the mountain cavern, slumbered a dark and brimming pool.

The girl sat down on one of the fallen boulders; her companion threw himself beside her at her feet. They looked about them. It was a still morning. Some swallows flitted sharply past, clinging with low uneasy cries to the hanging water-plants overhead; the joyous river foamed from out the cavern, leaping wildly down through the leafy cleft to the valley beneath; below them the tall sycamores swayed slowly to and fro in the sunlight; there came a pleasant sound of the winged wind in the tops of the planes.

“Do you see those niches in the rock?” asked Stuart.

And then they both looked up at the empty shrines of the nymphs, shrines curved like some delicate shell of the sea. And on each but one of these forgotten altars grew some blooming plant, the last tribute perhaps of that eternal pagan, Nature, to her dead gods; not mere white lilies grew there, or the soft poppy with red leaves, but rather young anemones, the flower of golden-haired Venus, and inscribed leaves of hyacinth.

The ground was covered with low creeping thyme; Constance dragged it off in wet handfuls from the dripping rocks to make a garland for that only empty shrine. And like two young Greeks, and with a fantastic seriousness, they hung the purple tribute in its place. “It might be,” the girl said, smiling dreamily, “it might.

be that the old gods were not dead but only sleeping; and who could tell what answer they would send? 'For the entrances of the elder world were wide and sure and brought immortal fruit.'"

The wise old goats had started off at sight of these strange faces, but now they came trooping boldly back, pushing their way to the water-splashed cave. And as these two young people turned again to descend to the valley, there was a sudden quick pattering of sharp feet among the stones, a black-faced ram with a long white beard sprang nimbly on a boulder, and, planting his sharp feet firmly against the rock, he reached his venerable head towards the garland.

"Surely this is only the disguise of some old priest of Pan," the girl said, glancing back mirthfully. "See, Jack—see! he has actually reached it——"

Stuart was standing a step or two below her, and she touched his shoulder lightly to make him look up.

"Oh yes, I see," he said in a vague fashion.

They went down a little farther. A brook crossed the pathway ; the stones were slippery with water. It was a steep and difficult descent.

"Here, let me help you. It is much harder coming down. Give me your hand; I can lift you over," the young man said eagerly.

"Oh, I can spring," said Constance.

She stood balancing herself for a moment on the stone. The little torrent foamed and splashed about her feet ; a sharp ray of sunshine pierced the leaves overhead and touched her hair and the delicate outline of her throat. Stuart looked at her.

"Oh, very well. But if you fall you will hurt yourself; and if you think I am going to let you have the chance of hurting yourself, why—why you are mistaken," he said with sudden audacity.

He walked back deliberately through the shallow water and threw his arm about her waist and lifted her to the other side.

"Constance, are you very angry?" he asked. He bent down his head and kissed her on the cheek.

For an instant she stood quite still, startled into quiescence. She lifted up her face, and he in his turn was fairly disconcerted by the look of mute reproach in her eyes.

"I did not expect that from you, Jack," she said simply. Her lip trembled a little. "Will you let me pass?"

"I shall not let you pass," he said

boldly ; but there was more of entreaty than of defiance in his voice. "I shall not let you leave me so. Oh, I know that you have a right to be angry, but Constance, I could not help it, dear. I am so sorry. But you expect me to be with you, and see you, and talk to you, and never tell you a word of how I love you," he said doggedly, "and I can't do it; I won't. You should not ask a man to do the impossible."

The branches rustled beneath them, and there was a sound of approaching footsteps along the path.

"Oh, confound it all," he said impatiently, "here comes somebody—of course! And if you would only listen to me for a moment Constance; if you will only say you are not——"

Well, it was an awful for everybody. "And if t

result of early rising," Mr. Ferris remarked afterwards, "why, early rising was a mistake.

"I told you all along what would be happening," he said to Davenant; "I knew we should walk into the midst of some lovers' quarrel. And a nice mess it was we made!"

Which was the more ungrateful that it was Davenant himself who had saved the situation; Davenant—who looked upon Jack Stuart as a Philistine—who considered him in simple good faith as a mere incident, of no possible importance to art—and who now came forward and was the first to address Constance.

"Oh Miss Varley," he said earnestly, "I wish you would come with me a moment. I want you to come and listen to this falling out. Do you know that there was a temple here once—a fair,



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white temple to Pan ; and now the temple is gone, the god is gone, and there is only the river calling, calling from the secret places of the mountain. It is like the voice of the old gods of Hellas—like the love of the Greeks in a man's life—something luring and irresistible, and full of mysterious power."

"Yes ; I will come with you," said Constance, very quietly.

There was a burning and indignant flush on her cheeks, but she spoke quite steadily, and there was little of embarrassment or hesitation to be detected in her firm proud bearing as she turned and walked away.

"Are you going up ? Oh well, I am going down," said Stuart. It was in no very enviable mood the young man returned to camp.

But how was it possible to cherish resentment long on such a morning ? The

hillside was a wilderness of joyously-running water-threads; and as they rode away from camp the horses picked their way across a soaked and spongy soil. The hedges and bushes were ablaze with buds of every colour, and flowers that breathed the odours of Paradise. There was a certain bush of myrtle in blossom which Constance will never forget—it was only three days' ride from Damascus. And how the birds sang that morning! The very rapture and fulness of life seemed looking at the girl from every flower along the pathway—seemed calling to her in every sound of running water and the singing of birds—seemed shining in the sunlight—seemed floating about her on every breath of the warm and fitful breeze.

She rode between Ferris and the Major. There was no end to the eager questions she asked. Should they reach Damascus



in the morning or at evening? Could one see it from a long distance off? Was it a very large city? And here she bent over and busied herself with the adjustment of her reins.

“Not so large as Cairo? Oh, of course not. Cairo,” Miss Varley said, “is a city where everyone seems lost. If you have friends there, and they are not staying at your hotel, it may be weeks before you see them at all.”

The Major smiled. “I thought I heard you objecting once at the quantity of people Fanny made us know at Cairo?” he said.

But there was no difficulty of that kind at Damascus, Ferris observed, carelessly. Miss Varley would find there was but one—at least one civilised—hotel.

And all day long they rode on much in this same fashion, climbing steadily

higher over rich green hill-slopes and under darkly-luxuriant trees, until it was almost as good as being in a park, Fanny observed approvingly. Mrs. Thayer was not in the habit of paying compliments to Nature. But with evening there came a change in the character of the landscape. They were fast approaching Mount Hermon, the ground had grown rocky, and already there was a snow-chill in the air, and a thin bleak wind whistling about the tents. It was not an evening for much confidential discourse.

The next morning found them toiling through a labyrinth of rocky defiles, deep in the heart of the hills. It was an arid and shadowless country—a land of pale barren slopes, where the grass grew thin and sear, crossed by a curious network of small white paths, which meet and intersect, and part and climb again, like the

curious tracery of lines on the rind of a melon—a sterile country, where the very rock-forms seem poor and trivial and meaningless. But presently the road narrowed to a track barely wide enough for a single horse. For an hour or more they wound their way along a steep limestone gulley, between two walls of towering rock. The day was terribly hot. The cruel sunshine glared pitilessly down upon the white rocks, the ground under foot was hard like iron. For a long time they rode on in silence, the very song of the muleteers was hushed. The horses plodded wearily forward, with spiritless drooping heads, and then Lione would run on a few steps and lie down panting, trying vainly to crowd himself beneath the prickly shade of the dead thorn-bushes, and starting the great lizards basking in the sun. Once a caravan from Damascus met and

crossed their path—a line of muffled figures, silent and white—and exchanged a listless salute. And again there was nothing to be seen but the naked limestone walls, the cruel sunshine, and, overhead, the pitiless dark sky.

But now the Major, riding on in front, saw the horse before him raise his head, prick up his ears, and start forward with a low whinny of delight. The rocks turned sharply to the right, opened out, fell back; and now the heat and glare had vanished, for a cool snow-wind swept in their faces; and before them, across a stretch of level plain the lord of mountains rose in white resplendent majesty.

The track still wound upward, nearer and nearer to the edge of that snow. And presently small flowers and grasses started up beside the pathway; a little brook

sprang suddenly from behind a granite boulder and ran singing along the road ; a flock of big brown goats ran bleating before the horses, and they entered a narrow valley all silvery with olive-trees.

Here they dismounted for the noonday halt. It was a silent and a peaceful spot. The little brook babbled softly to itself among the grasses ; the wind lifted and stirred the silvery-gray leaves overhead ; a brindled old sheep-dog, with a gentle sagacious face, left his flock upon the hill-side and came and made friends with Constance. He even followed her as she strolled slowly along the brook ; he watched her gather flowers ; he gave a low growl of warning, and placed himself protectingly before her, when, leaning against an olive tree, his hands in his pockets, and his hat well over his eyes, they chanced unexpectedly upon Jack.

He had not heard them coming, and now, as he started and looked up at the sheep-dog's bark, there was something so dejected in his attitude, an expression of such dumb half-understood trouble upon the handsome sun-burned features, that Constance never hesitated for a moment. She went impulsively forward; she held out her hand.

"We—— There isn't any reason we should not be good friends Jack, is there?" she said in her gentle voice.

And however incoherent Stuart's answer may have been, there was still a certain blunt earnestness about it which touched her to quite a singular degree. For, "There is nothing I would not do—I would rather cut my hand off than offend you," the young man assured her wildly; "and you—you have hardly spoken to me for these two days." And Constance was

moved with something almost like remorse as she thought of the beautiful dreaming in which those two days had passed. To a noble, to a sensitive nature, it is often in this very power which it possesses over another that lies the secret of its heaviest bond. She looked at him, and there was an expression of wistful trouble he had surely never seen in that frank clear glance before.

"I am sorry," she answered sadly. "Sometimes—sometimes I think I ought to tell you, Jack——"

A hot flush came over her face. She left the sentence unfinished, and turned abruptly away.

And still the little brook babbled softly to itself among the grasses ; the flickering sunshine came and went with the stirring of the leaves ; the brindled sheep-dog followed their gestures with his gentle intel-

lilent eyes, and Stuart wondered in silence over this strange, this delicious new shyness in his companion. "Could it be possible?" the young man asked himself. He felt his pulse beat faster at the very supposition. A wild new hope, vague and wordless and strong, had awakened, was even now stirring in his heart. When he rejoined the others a moment later there was no one present who did not feel the contagion of his impetuous high spirits and content. He even endeavoured to encourage art; he asked Ferris to explain the mechanism of his sketching-box; he listened with perfect complacency to Davenant's remarks.

"I know a man who has made the ascent of Mount Hermon," that young gentleman was saying; "he went up to explore for temples. Do you know that there are places here, in this very Lebanon, where the sun-worship is as living, the



rites as sacred, as in the old days of Nineveh?"

And as the spring wind rustled among the branches, and fleet cloud-shadows passed across the sunny grass, they lay beneath the olive-trees, looking out upon the sacred mountain—the lonely mountain where, from the Druse with his half-Egyptian mysteries, to the Greek, to the Mahomedan, to the Jew—from Astarte to Christ—there is not a religion, not a faith, not a practice, but has found shelter amid the inviolate sanctity of its snows.

It was night when they reached Rasheiya. For the first time in many days the camp was pitched within the limits of a town. There was something strange, almost impressive in these long low lines of silent houses, in these dark and narrow streets where the horses' feet awoke a hollow echo from the stones.

The tents were ranged around a lofty terrace set about with a low wall ; and after dinner Constance slipped out unnoticed, and came and leaned upon this parapet. The night was moonless, but high overhead there was a white glimmer of snow under the stars, and the air had a sharp edge to it as it swept coldly down from those bleak and lonely heights. It was almost the first moment Constance had been alone that day. Now, as she stood in this silent darkness, looking out from the mountain-side across the shadowy stretch of plain, a great trouble and longing were in her heart. She looked out to the far horizon : somewhere in that darkness, a short day's journey off, lay the city of her dreams. But somehow, in these last moments a deep shrinking distrust had stolen into her very soul. She remembered the last time she had seen Lawrence ; the

manner of their parting ; she thought with a sort of despair of the years that had rolled between. All doubts, all fears, all hesitations seemed to take form and substance in this chilly darkness.

She looked about her. The uncertain silhouette of the town rose up in dark confusion against a clear cold sky. She listened, and with a superstitious tremor she heard the wailing note of a bugle borne faintly on the wind from the barracks which crown the hill. For the moment, all her fine, high-strung courage had vanished, had given place to some wild presentiment of woe ; for the moment she absolutely dreaded the idea of Damascus.

She stood there so long that her dog, who had followed her from the tent, grew impatient ; he came closer to her ; he pushed his cold nose into her hand and whined.

And surely there must have been something reassuring in the very touch of this unexpected companionship, for now she turned suddenly and knelt down beside him, and laid her cheek against his delicate head.

"Lione," she said with childish earnestness, "tell me, Lione, how will it end?" She looked wistfully out into the darkness. "I have waited so long," she said, "I have been so patient——"

The dog whined again and looked up in her face and laid his paw on her hand. Someone threw back the door of the tent; a stream of light poured out into the night, and a voice called "Constance!" And presently Constance came. She came in very quietly; she sat down beside the table; she took up a book. When Fanny made some remark she answered it. But she was very silent all the evening, and

Stuart remembered afterward how pale she was, and how she did not give him her hand as they bade each other "Good-night."

"Mrs. Thayer," said Davenant, reining up his horse beside her, late on the following afternoon, "Mrs. Thayer, do you know that in five minutes more we shall have reached the road?"

It was the first road they had seen since leaving Jerusalem, and the very horses seemed impressed with this evidence of approaching civilisation. They hesitated; they stood still; they stepped daintily down upon this smooth white surface. With one accord they threw up their heads and went off at a mad gallop beneath the overhanging cliffs. And now they passed a small wooden station where men with Arab faces and French livery came out to stare at them as they cantered on; and now a

rumbling clattering diligence rolled ponderously by.

“Are you sorry to be back in the world again?” asked Ferris, with a smile. He had taken a good deal of artistic interest in watching Miss Varley’s face these last two days. As a general rule Mr. Ferris cared very little for women.

This was to be the last camp—at Dimas. As they got off their horses in front of the white row of tents it was with a certain feeling of reluctance. The pleasant familiar life was at an end.

It was only a bare and colourless desert which stretched before them now—a low and solitary and undulating waste, set about with blank gray rocks. But, as if to consecrate with some peculiar beauty these last hours of their nomad life, a wonderful sunset shone and flamed behind

the barrier of those pale ashen peaks. The young men brought out an armful of Turkish rugs after dinner. They spread them before the tents, along the terrace-wall; they smoked, they drank their coffee, they watched the slow and splendid procession of the clouds.

Somehow the conversation had fallen upon Lawrence.

"By-the-way, George," said Davenant, suddenly, "it won't be much of a joke, will it, if you get back to Damascus only to find that Lawrence has left?"

"Well, no. Particularly as I have got those sketches with me. But—— Oh, he will be there fast enough," said Ferris confidently.

"I'm not so sure about that. We agreed to be only a fortnight, you know; and it's more than three weeks——"

"What, you think he will be gone

then? I hope not. I should be sorry to miss seeing Lawrence again. But where did he think of going to, any way?" asked the Major.

Mr. Ferris was engaged in lighting his cigar. It was an act requiring some deliberation in this high wind, which was perhaps the reason of his delay in answering.

"Oh — it's only some nonsense of Davenant's," he said uneasily; "Lawrence thought something of going to Persia once. He never meant it."

"Oh, didn't he though?" said Davenant. "Why, I saw the beautiful——"

Ferris turned on his elbow and looked at him.

"It is a pity the ladies are missing all this sunset," he remarked quietly. "I never saw a finer one. Ah, there they are at last."



He got up and offered his place to Constance. The talk drifted in another way.

But somehow Davenant seemed possessed with one idea. They had been speaking of the ruined temples, and someone had observed how strange it was that there never should have been any expression of plastic art in Judæa.

It was easy enough to understand, the young Englishman averred boldly. For what was the existence of plastic art but an admission of a sense of the regnant force of physical beauty? What was Greek art itself but a recognition that beauty is a form of goodness? And what was Christianity but the passionate pleading and protest of the suffering soul against the pagan idea?

"For my part, I would rather not be merely an angel," said Mr. Davenant; "I

love the earth. When I die I should wish to be like one of the old Hellenic shades, still rejoicing and sorrowing over the fortunes of my race—full of sad wisdom and pity unutterable.”

“But really, Mr. Davenant——!” said Fanny.

“That has nothing to do with it, of course,” the young man said, evidently following out his own line of thought. “But how could you expect an expression of pure art from a mixed people? How could Syria produce anything but a literature, when every civilisation of the old world—Assyrian, Persian, Egyptian, Indian—had poured their science, their legends, and their influence over the land? If you destroy the purity of the race, you have set the death-seal on the possibility of a pure and distinctive art.”

"Now hold on a moment, Davenant. I protest as an American——"

"As an American, my dear boy, you merely serve to illustrate my theory. Why, look here. If you want a case in point, take Lawrence. We were speaking of Lawrence before you came, Miss Varley——"

"Yes?" said Constance.

She was leaning on her elbow, playing with the amber beads about her wrist. But now she looked up and listened.

"He is half a Frenchman, you know. At least, his mother's family was French——"

"Southerners."

"Well, French Southerners then. They had French blood in them at all events. And what is the consequence? Why, Lawrence is born a cosmopolitan. His feelings, his sympathies——"

“A cosmopolitan? That is to say a man belonging to nowhere in particular. A cosmopolitan! Why, I’d sooner be a flying-fish,” said Jack.

## CHAPTER VII.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

DAVENANT looked back ; there was a great light of enthusiasm on his face.

“ ‘ For are not Abana and Pharpar,’ ” he said, “ ‘ are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel ? ’ ”

They had left Dimas in the early morning and already the sky was paling with the noonday heat. It was a strange country they were passing through. For hours they had ridden across the short dead turf of the plain beside a blank white road.

It was a land of vast rolling slopes—the dark reddish soil broken here and there by the ploughman's furrow. A country bare of vegetation, shadowless, naked, vast, and grand, because of two grand things—simple forms and solitude.

It was some time now since they had left the baggage-train behind them; the slow-moving palanquin had dwindled to a mere black spot, crawling along the road.

"It was a capital idea to make you ride this morning," the Major told his wife.

"Look here, Constance, I wish you would be reasonable and change horses with either Ferris or me," Mr. Stuart observed confidentially; "that brute shies; why, he jumps across the road at the shadow of a leaf!"

"Yes," said Constance absently. "But

I like Shaitan," she said, turning her face towards him with a smile.

There was a singular elegance and precision about her every gesture that morning. The young man noted with a certain surprise that she moved more slowly. She spoke little, but her gentle voice seemed to have grown clearer, more bell-like in tone, and tense, like the tense cord of an instrument. Her very riding-dress was adjusted with more than usual care.

"Can you fancy being so excited over the mere approach to a city, a city where there is no society nor anything?" Mrs. Thayer asked Ferris with an indulgent smile.

They had passed the last mail-station, and now there came a descent, an unexpected turn in the long and weary road. A bald and sun-scorched cliff rose up on either side; the reflected heat was intense;

they had left the grass, and the dust was rising in choking clouds about the horses' feet.

And now Davenant looked back.

A sudden turn in the road; a sudden rush of streams; coolness and shade—the sense of running water and the shade of trees — slow swaying poplars and leafy walnuts, and the sunlight shining through pale apple-blooms.

“‘For are not Abana and Pharpar,’” the young man said, “‘are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?’”

The river foamed and whitened under overhanging branches; the cliffs towered up higher behind them; the “golden-flowing” waters sank lower out of sight. “And now we shall see the city soon,” said Davenant to Constance.

She looked up and smiled, and did



not answer. The inconclusiveness of all her past experience had never fitted her for a moment like this. She had spent her life in dreaming of happiness until its reality had assumed the aspect of a dream. She followed the others as in a vision; she heard them laughing, talking about her, riding faster and faster down the narrowing mountain-gorge; and the rapid motion, the clattering of hoofs, the rush of the water, seemed sweeping her onward in a sort of trance.

And now they galloped out again into the blinding sunlight; they left the road; before them rose a low white range of hills, and on the rocky crest a small white building with a dome. They left the horses; they toiled up the sandy path. Stuart was the first one in the doorway. "Come in," he said. He offered Constance his hand; he watched with a curious

interest the sudden light in her eyes, the sudden flush of colour on her cheek. For they had stepped out upon a small rocky plateau where a swarm of yellow butterflies hovered about the stones. Beneath them lay a city and a plain—a wilderness of deep up-springing green—a curving line of warm-tinted houses and glittering mosques and sharply-piercing minarets. And beyond that rose the violet mountains grown silver-pale in the blinding heat; and beyond that the pale border-line of infinite desert space; and all about the city a network of shining streams, a foam of blossoming trees, circled and crowned the gardens of Damascus.

They sat down in the shade of the building; for awhile they sat there in silence, looking at this wonderful sight. But the more prosaic a nature the sooner does it grow familiar with rare beauty.

Hardly a moment had passed before Mrs. Thayer and Stuart were disputing some detail in the view; in a quarter of an hour they had completely forgotten its existence. Jack was hungry, and Fanny forgot to turn her head as they descended the hill.

And Constance followed them down as in a dream. They mounted their horses again; they rode past miles of blossom-whitened orchards, by winding rivers, through poplar groves and hedges white with may. And tall white irises rose up beside the full and silent stream; and now they had reached the level of the plain, and passed the first bridge and seen the first house, all gilded and gay with fantastic tracery on its walls, and hidden in deep trees.

"And this is Damascus," said Davenant. But Constance did not answer. She rode

on at foot-pace, checking her horse until the hot-mouthed brute curveted and pranced, flecking his breast with foam. And she rode steadily forward, reining him in, erect, silent, looking straight ahead with wide open eyes and a smile of vague triumph on the proud and sensitive mouth.

It was a moment of exquisite delight. The barriers were down, the long anguish of patience at an end. She had risen to the climax of her experience—the culminating hour of youth, in which she held and possessed the world. The barriers were all down, the years of restraint at an end; a surging flood of love—love irresistible, compelling, supreme—had obliterated the last landmark of her past. She rode beneath the flowering branches, and the sunshine crowned her hair with golden touches, and the light wind showered

frail perfumed petals at her feet ; and the song of the birds had a meaning, the sky was cloudless, and all the world was full of gracious promise of fast coming summer, as she passed through the gates of the earthly paradise to take possession of her life.

Presently they reached the hotel. They rode down the tortuous street called Straight, and dismounted at a small postern-door. It was their first experience of the interior of a Damascene house, and they looked about with some curiosity at the cool and spacious court, the shady divan, the formal rows of orange-trees, the plashing fountain in its marble tank.

And here for a time the party separated. Davenant and Ferris had rooms elsewhere in town.

“I shall see you again this evening ?  
We are all here more or less in the

evening," the latter said, as he stopped to shake hands with Constance.

She looked up eagerly, as though about to ask some question. Davenant was watching her.

"I beg your pardon ; I did not hear what you said ?"

She smiled and shook her head and gave him her hand. It was nothing. The two young men walked down the street together for some distance without speaking.

"It is a pity, for there is the unsatisfied soul of a poet in that nature," said Davenant suddenly, with peculiar emphasis ; and Ferris halted and stared.

He had thought himself pretty well accustomed to his friend's mental vagaries by this time, but here was a new development—something in his tone, an earnestness of conviction in his manner which filled him with amused surprise.

“Well, you *are* the rummiest beggar,” he said good-humouredly. He turned and scrutinised with keen amusement his companion’s dramatic face.

“As a general rule I should not advise you to study the unsatisfied souls of your young lady acquaintances too closely, my boy,” he said dryly ; “you might find Stuart objecting to the process, you see.”

They walked on a few paces.

“Shall we go and find out what’s become of that fellow Lawrence ?” said George.

Constance had gone up to where the Major was busy settling conditions with the turbaned proprietor of the inn. She slipped her hand under his arm and stood silently by his side.

“Well, Constance ?”

“I like that man’s embroidered jacket,

Miss Varley answered vaguely. She dipped her fingers into the water and then dried them elaborately on her handkerchief. "You are going—are you going to the Consulate, Tom?"

For letters? Well, yes; the Major had thought something of going there.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he asked with a smile. He looked curiously at her. "Is there anything you want to know?"

She turned her face away. This last hour had brought its own experience. She felt weaker, less sure of herself. She felt, as never before, a sudden craving for support and confidence.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" the Major repeated.

She lifted up her honest eyes. "Yes," she said shyly, her lips growing pale with the effort.



It was then that Fanny came up with some question about the rooms.

"I will see about it," her husband said. He turned to Constance. "You are going to the bazaars, you two? I shall take Hassan. If I hear any news about anyone—about—about Aunt Van, for instance,—I will bring it to you with your letters," he said significantly.

"Very well." The girl nodded assent.

"You may expect me in—well, say in a couple of hours," the Major said. He took up his stick. "You are coming, Stuart?"

"Now, don't forget that we are waiting, Tom," expostulated Mrs. Thayer.

Some people coming in at that moment hardly glanced at the middle-aged man crossing the courtyard before turning to gaze curiously at the handsome girl he had just left. But in her eyes, at least, that commonplace gray figure was suddenly

invested with all the dignity of fate. "In a couple of hours," he had said. 'Her breath came quicker with suppressed emotion. She put her hand up, uncertainly, to her lips. In a couple of hours. Her secret seemed slipping out of her grasp.

Not long after that they went into the bazaar. They went in with a Damascene courier, a wily Greek, with sleek face and black uneasy eyes. From time to time Mrs. Thayer was struck with the peculiar fashion in which he seemed analysing her dress.

"One would think the man had never seen a woman in his life!" she complained petulantly to Constance.

"He seems to me more interested in the cut of your over-dress, dear," said the latter with a laugh.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and the streets were crowded. Men in white, men

in scarlet, men in turbans, in fezes, in scanty cotton shirts and flowing robes of silk passed and repassed in mute and splendid throngs. A dusty pulverised sunshine filtered softly through the chinks in the boards overhead, piercing the deep amber-toned shadow with sudden revelations and jewels of light. Now and then the wild melancholy cry of a camel-driver, following the slow and swaying footsteps of his beasts, jarred on the golden silence with strange suggestion of far-off desert space.

They strolled slowly down the length of the silk bazaar, lingering here and there as their eyes were caught by some pigeon-throated gleam of colour, or the wind brought them some new and subtle hint of fragrant gums and the prisoned roses of Ispahan. And now the guide stopped and gazed at Fanny persuasively.

"It is Saturday, madame, if you would see the house of one Jew? Very fine house," he suggested.

Mrs. Thayer was charmed with the idea. They entered another courtyard; it was a larger, more sumptuous interior than any they had seen. An old woman, carrying a nargileh, was crossing the court before them, her high inlaid pattens making a clicking sound upon the marble floor. The courier hailed her. They spoke for a moment or two in shrill emphatic voices.

"She will call the ladies to see you," the man observed with a complacent air.

He led them to a marble divan; there was a Persian rug upon the inlaid pavement; some gold-embroidered cushions; a gaily-painted wall from which the plaster fell in patches. It was now about three o'clock: a still and burning afternoon.

The broad fig-leaf shadows lay motionless upon the pavement; the blue of the sky was dulled and dark with heat. They sat down amongst the tumbled tinselled cushions; presently a door opened on the other side of the court. A group of unveiled women came slowly out into the blazing sunshine; they dropped their pattens at the foot of the divan and crossed languidly over to where Fanny was sitting. They threw themselves down on the cushions and gazed fixedly at their guests.

"It is the sister of the gentleman what keeps this house. You wait; p'raps by-and-by see the wife," the guide informed them in a whisper.

And now another servant appeared, in loose white dress, bearing a tray of glasses. And then came nargilehs, and then a long pause.

The sunlight flickered on gold-wrought

headdresses, on brown and naked feet, on long delicate sinuous forms. Presently a half-grown lad lifted the curtain behind them, a lad with a smooth yellow face and a wizened look, and dull and restless eyes. He came slowly down the steps and spoke to the interpreter with a certain listless condescension. A shrill series of exclamations followed suddenly upon his entrance; a woman rose from the group and touched Miss Varley on the arm. "You go in other room, see his wife," the guide explained complacently.

There were three women sitting in this inner chamber—three Jewesses, with hard and splendid eyes, with loose shawls about their waists, and close-fitting caps thick set with pomegranate blossoms and artificial flowers and glittering diamond studs. Some little children were sprawling on the carpet at their feet; the walls

were painted with intricate tracery of colour; a coarse cheap lithograph hung high under the vaulted ceiling against some precious Persian tiles. A table, covered with a cloth, stood against the entrance; there was another tray of sweetmeats, a new set of silver-mouthed nargilehs on the floor.

And here, by-the-way, they discovered the true purpose of their visit.

"My lady come from Cairo," the guide began insinuatingly, glancing at Fanny.

"We have been to Cairo," said Mrs. Thayer.

"Cairo very fine place, my lady. The Khedive live in Cairo." He took up the fold of her travelling-dress between his fingers. "You get this in Cairo?" he said.

Mrs. Thayer smiled uneasily; she looked at Constance.

"I got it there—yes," she said, with some reluctance.

And now the man hesitated. He looked about him; the woman on the divan followed his movements with intensest interest. "My lady very kind. Very good lady. P'raps you let one these women see how you make your dress?" he suggested feebly.

And Fanny once gone there was nothing left to occupy Constance. A feverish restlessness of impatience had come upon her. She sat there a moment looking around with blank unseeing eyes; she got up, she wandered away across the sunny court, and one or two of the women rose and followed her.

She went up the wooden staircase at the farther end; above them was an open terrace, green vine leaves, and the fierce red of pomegranate blossoms in the sun.



She leaned over the balustrade and looked down into the court. A sleepy negress lounged with bare feet in the shadow of the wall. There was not a sound in all the house about her but the cool plashing of the fountain on the stones. She leaned out over the balustrade; a girl came silently up the winding stair, and paused, and leaned beside her.

Constance turned her head; presently she recognised the face. It was one of the young Jewesses—the mother of the little children they had seen below. The two girls stood looking at each other for a moment in silence—the representatives of two antagonistic civilisations — and gradually the interest faded out of the new comer's face. She turned aside with the facile indifference of a child. She crossed her long arms above her head with superb *nonchalance*; dragged down

a flowering branch of vine. The leaves fluttered slowly to the ground through her listless fingers ; the long lashes drooped lower on her cheek ; her light breathing hardly stirred the flashing diamonds on her breast ; she stood motionless, in absolute repose.

And Constance looked at her. I don't know what there was about this woman to remind the girl of Lawrence. She noted with a sudden sinking of heart every detail of that impassioned and unremembering beauty, the perfect oval of her smooth sun-warmed cheek, the rings of shadow about those delicate temples, the vapid scarlet mouth, the dark mystery of the beautiful cruel eyes. These were the women he had been seeing, she thought. She turned away abruptly. She turned away her face, she looked up at the blank blue sky above her, and her

own eyes filled with miserable tears. She dashed them indignantly away. The white walls in the sunshine flashed and flickered before her, and she stared down at them, a great sense of impatience, a bitter feeling of impotence rising slowly within her as she looked. She pressed her hand hard against the wooden balustrade until it left a bruise across the soft white flesh.

The Jewess laughed. A small green worm had crawled out from between the leaves. She laughed; she broke off a branch from the tree beside her, stripping it slowly of its leaves, her eyes fixed exultingly upon the crawling insect. And now she leaned curiously forward, with a quick movement—a sudden look of hatred and disgust flashing over her face. She struck the thing with the end of her stick; she threw it against the wall,

thrusting it back and striking at it again and again—her whole figure instinct and supple with savage and futile delight.

Involuntarily Constance put out her hand.

“ Oh don’t, please don’t,” she said.

It was a scene she remembered long afterward—the blazing sunlight, the cruel foolish laughter of her companion — the wretched insect crushed beneath their feet. For it was at that moment she heard a voice calling her. “ Come down, Constance ! The letters are here.”

She rose to her feet and went forward a step. “ It has come,” putting out a hand blindly.

Hassan was waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. She brushed past him ; she went up to Fanny : “ Well ? ”

Mrs. Thayer did not answer for a moment, She held an open letter in her hand.

There was something which amused her ; she laughed and crushed the thin blue paper in her fingers.

“ Well ? Oh yes ; I had forgotten. There is a note from Tom somewhere. We are to meet him. Why, Constance, what’s the matter with you ? Are you ill ? ”

“ I—oh, it is the sun, I suppose. I have been standing in the sun,” incoherently. And then, her face flushing : “ You said there was a letter for me to read ? ”

It was a leaf torn from a note-book, and written in pencil.

“ DEAR F.—Tell the guide to take you to Aboo Antika’s. Will wait for you there. I send the letters by Hassan. There is a pile of them here waiting for Aunt Van. And, by-the-way, tell Con-

stance they knew nothing about Lawrence at the bank, but I have seen the consul's dragoman. He thinks Lawrence has left for Bagdad."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### UN ENFANT DU SIECLE.

AND about the same time that Miss Varley was reading this letter, Mr. Ferris was standing in front of a closed door, making the quiet street resound with his impatient knocking.

After three or four minutes of this exercise there came a slow and distant shuffling of feet.

"The old idiot?" said Ferris, between his teeth. He knocked again. The steps drew nearer and paused; a hand fumbled about the latch.

"You had better be careful how you introduce dangerous characters into this palace of yours, my friend," the young man remarked with a certain good-natured contempt. He put his hand in his pocket and took out a small piece of money, "Here, Methuselah !"

The Arab's eyes lightened in their dim sockets ; he bowed profoundly ; a smile flickered over his austere and covetous face.

But Mr. Ferris did not linger to observe his sensations. He walked on with an assured and familiar step through the hot sunshine between the walls. There was a disused bath-house at the farther end of the courtyard ; a fig-tree drooped before its entrance ; he put aside the branches and looked in.

There was an artist's easel in the corner, and the artist himself standing before it,



whistling in an undertone, and measuring something about his picture with a string. As a shadow fell over his canvas he turned his head. He caught sight of Ferris and put out his hand, with a quick look of pleasure on his face. It was a singularly mobile and sensitive countenance for an American: hardly effeminate, and yet you were puzzled by its suggestion of a woman's face until you noticed the changeable gray eyes, and realised how much this man must look like his mother.

He was a slightly-built young fellow too, rather under than above the average height, with small clear-cut features, a very firm and beautiful mouth, a quiet and rather indolent manner. Major Thayer had called him insignificant-looking, once; no woman would have used the epithet.

“ Well, George ! ”

"Ah! they told me I should find you here," said Ferris.

"Been back long?"

"About three hours. I went up to the house for you first. They said you had moved your traps over to the other shop?"

Lawrence nodded. "Old Ahmed is only waiting for his brother's camels now to start. I have been expecting to be off any day this last week," taking up his palette and brushes and turning to his work; "I am glad you are back again in time to see me off, old boy. I had almost given you up."

"Oh, Davenant *would* stop;" absently this, and with an air of chagrin. "We have been travelling with some people——Hollo! Why, when did you do that? That is a good bit, by Jove! Deuced good. And how well that figure comes in there. Who is it? not Abdallah?"

"No, the other one; I don't know his name. The little chap who used to clean my brushes for me. I had him in here one day, and—— Here's another thing you haven't seen," taking up a second canvas from the corner.

Mr. Ferris looked at it critically for a moment.

"Yes; I don't know where it is exactly?"

"In the Arms Bazaar. I've been working down there a good deal of late. The only thing finished is the background, of course. The figures are only indicated you see. I've been making some separate studies for those."

"I see. I don't seem to fancy that sky much, Lawrence. Painty, isn't it, rather? There's a good bit of work there on that wall."

"You think so? I shan't have time

to do much more to it, I'm afraid," taking up the canvas, and looking at it regretfully.

"Well, I'm sorry to hear you say that," Ferris answered gravely.

There was a moment's silence; then the older man glanced up from his work.

"Will you smoke?"

"I've got some here," taking out his own cigar-case.

"Yes; I'm sorry to hear you are going, Lawrence. It's a mistake—a foolish business all round. I wish," said Ferris suddenly, "I wish you would give it up, old fellow. I wish to heaven old Ahmed would refuse to take you!"

Lawrence laughed. "Wait till you see the picture I bring back. There is not another face in the East like it—not one. It is a type apart. And then the romance of the thing, my boy; the shadowless

mystery of it all; the long desert journey; the illimitable desert skies; the silence of waste places——”

“Et cetera. I should expect to hear that sort of stuff from Davenant,” said Ferris.

His companion laughed again good-naturedly. “Well, he isn’t wrong half the time, the little beggar. Beauty is a form of goodness, I daresay. At all events, it’s the form best suited to my comprehension. And you forget the picture I mean to paint——”

“Provided that old fool Ahmed will let you paint her, which I, for one, don’t believe. I sincerely hope he won’t. Why, the whole thing is an absurdity on the face of it! A six-weeks’ journey with a mob of half-civilised savages across a desert, on the chance of painting a girl you have only seen once, and that by

accident. Why, if you did see her you could not even speak!"

"And I'm not so sure that is not the best part of it all," said Lawrence lightly. "That and the getting to Ispahan. I've been studying Persian while you were away, Ferris. Old Ahmed is a capital master. On the whole I am not so sure I shall not propose to marry into the family, and turn camel-driver myself. But the choice is between the Desert and Constantinople. I leave this in any case," turning to his work with a gesture which dismissed the subject.

A silence, with nothing to break it but the slow dripping of the fountain and the rustling of the fig-leaves out there in the sun. Mr. Ferris strolled over to the window, and began turning over some prints.

"By-the-way, I hope you knew I had

that portfolio of yours safely with me?" he said: "the one with the Esdraelon cartoons. I only found it out at Jerusalem. I suppose I packed it up by mistake."

"Oh, that's all right," said Lawrence carelessly.

He went on with his painting. Before long he got up, walked back a few steps, and looked intently at his work, and then a satisfied look came into his face. In a moment he began singing softly to himself:

Si je vous le disais pourtant, que je vous aime,  
Qui sait, brune aux yeux bleus, ce que vous en  
diriez?

L'amour, le vous savez——

"You're a little in my light, old fellow."

L'amour, vous le savez, cause une peine extrême.

"But I say," breaking off his song abruptly,

"you haven't told me anything about your trip?"

Mr. Ferris looked up from the etchings. "I have not done much. A few sketches—they are up at the house with my traps—but nothing of consequence. I was disappointed in the country, rather."

"Well, I don't know," said Lawrence; "there are fine things there about Esdraelon. And how did Davenant like it? You said you had some people with you——"

"By Jove! I had forgotten all about them," the young man said. "And they are friends of yours, too. A Major Thayer and his wife and——"

"Major Thayer! What, not old Tom Thayer, surely? Well, that is a joke; and what the devil is he doing here, I should like to know?"

Well, Major Thayer was travelling, Mr.



Ferris supposed. Travelling, like anybody else. His wife was with him too, and a good-looking man by the name of Stuart."

Lawrence nodded. "I know. Jack Stuart, his cousin. I've seen him once or twice."

"And then," said Ferris, turning suddenly, and looking his friend hard in the face, "and then Miss Varley is with them too."

Mr. Lawrence looked up for a moment with a puzzled air. "Miss Varley?" he said reflectively. His face lightened. "Constance Varley! Ah, that is good news, indeed," with cordial pleasure. "A nice girl that, Ferris; and honest and fearless as the day. I saw a great deal of her three or four years ago, before I left home. We were great friends that winter, I remember. And so she is here?" taking up his brushes again, and touching his

picture softly with a pleased smile. "I must go and look them up. I shall be glad to see her. I don't think she will have forgotten me."

Mr. Ferris leaned farther back in his chair. "Miss Varley is not, I should imagine, a person to forget old friends. But if you are so much interested in her," with another keen glance of inquiry, "if you are interested, you may care to hear that she is going to be married to Mr. Stuart shortly."

Lawrence started; he looked up incredulously. "To Stuart! Why, I had heard—— To Stuart! Constance Varley going to marry that fellow! Why, it's impossible, Ferris. But are you sure?"

"She has never told me of it herself," knocking the ash from his cigar deliberately. "Of course not. I have only known her four or five days; and I

hardly think it is an official engagement—yet.”

“But that girl marry Jack Stuart!”

“Well—the friends expect it. Mrs. Thayer told Claude. And Stuart seems a good enough sort of fellow in his way.”

“I should not have thought it would have been Miss Varley’s way, that’s all,” said Lawrence dryly. “Poor little Constance! Well, it’s the kind of match that must be made in heaven, I suppose. At least I know no one on earth who would care to accept the responsibility of such a waste of good material.”

Ferris smiled. “How about Mrs. Thayer?”

“Oh — Mrs. Thayer! That’s another suitable marriage for you, if you like. The fact is, marriage——”

He stopped, threw down his brushes impatiently, and faced round on his chair.

"Give me one of your cigars ; ' we will talk of something else. I haven't seen anybody to speak to for a fortnight ! I am beginning to forget the sound of my own voice."

The conversation became technical. They criticised some pictures. Ferris had been making some experiments with a new kind of quick-drying oil.

"You could not have a better vehicle for hasty sketches. You ought to try it, Lawrence," he said.

"Try it ? Try what ?" Mr. Lawrence started and begged his pardon.

"The fact is, I was thinking of something miles away. I have been living the life of a hermit so long I listen to gossip like a woman," with an indulgent smile at his own weakness. "Now, this marriage of Miss Varley's. But you don't know the girl as I do ; you wouldn't under-

stand. Why, that girl had all the craving for beauty, for expression, for utterance—— She had the temperament of an artist once,” with a puzzled look.

Ferris looked up slowly. “No ; I can’t understand. My own experience with women——” He got up hastily and walked across to the window. “God knows, it is hard sometimes to understand what a woman wants,” with a short laugh, a dark flush creeping over his boyish face.

The other man glanced at him quickly, and then looked steadily away. He had heard something of Ferris’s past history. “Poor old boy ! he’s thinking of that girl he was engaged to at Venice,” he thought.

“I wish you had been here last night,” he said aloud. “There was a Mahomedan festa of some kind in the great mosque,

The bazaar was illuminated ; there was a procession of dervishes with torches. I don't know what saint's day they were celebrating, but the consul sent all the strangers word it was safer not to show one's pale Christian face abroad."

"You were there, of course."

"Well—I find something rather amusing in being persecuted for my religious convictions. I enjoy the injustice of it" (with a laugh) ; "for, personally speaking, I confess I am still seeking for that Christian religion of which I hear so much, and which I find neither in superb cathedrals erected in honour of a dogma, nor in discourses adapted to the habits of a fashionable congregation, nor even in religious picture-frames and 'sincere' effects of painted glass, like our friend Davenant. The Catholics stultify and the Evangelicals starve me, and I am too fastidious—well,

too selfish, too snobbish, if you like the word better — to turn Communist. A paganism, tempered by epigrams, is, I believe, my present condition. When I discover the means of reconciling the irreconcilable—of serving God and mammon with a breath—I shall join some well-established Church. But until then” (carelessly) “I am an experimentalist—I worship at the altar of the unknown god.”

“Well,” said Ferris, “I don’t know. You would call it the result of inherent Philistinism, I suppose, but I must say I find heaven and earth about as much as I can manage, even in their present organised condition. To be sure I should not like to have to admit that to Davenant.”

“Davenant!” Lawrence laughed. “I want to see Davenant. I am curious to know how Jerusalem has affected him.

MOLE. 217

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DATE 28  
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' said Lawrence  
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ia for cultivat-

ing oneself is nothing more nor less than  
suicidal. Why, take the modern artist;  
look at modern art. It is interesting, if  
you like ; but what more ? interesting and  
impotent. And it must be so, by Jove !



it must," sitting up and speaking with sudden energy, "for culture is necessarily self-conscious. Its final aim is refinement, not strength; beauty, not exhilaration; the thirst for perfection—and with perfection, melancholy."

Ferris was leaning back, his hands clasped behind his head, staring placidly at the ceiling.

"How about the Greeks?" he said, looking up with an amused air.

It was a long time since he had seen Lawrence in one of these moods.

"The Greeks? You don't imagine that the Greeks were cultivated in our sense of the word? Culture began with the Renaissance, my dear fellow — when life became complex, when morality interfered, and a man ceased to lose sight of himself in his art. Culture, I tell you, is self-conscious, but genius is personal, and

modern public opinion has suppressed personality, and democracy has outlawed it. And because there is a small set of we artists who see this, it has become the fashion to try to be original—to *try* to be original, by Jove! and men spend years endeavouring to be spontaneous. Why, look at that thing," pointing to the picture on his easel; "look at that thing if you want to know what I mean. Clever? of course it's clever—damnably so. And when you think I meant to paint pictures once—— Ah, well! *On nâit demi-dieu et l'on meurt épicier*; and that's about the end of it," taking up his brushes again with a sigh.

He went on working in silence for several minutes, and again the fountain dripped audibly through the stillness, and the thin cold light crept farther down the wall. And presently Ferris rose; he

stretched his arms, he looked about him. "I must be going. I promised to meet Major Thayer. Are you coming too?" he asked.

Lawrence took out his watch and looked at it.

"I told the boy to come for my traps at five, and I expect Ahmed at the café. But give my compliments to the ladies. I will call on them at the hotel. And, I say, Ferris——"

"Well?"

"Don't say anything to them about my going; there's a good fellow. I can't have people canvassing my affairs, to begin with; and then, the fact is, your coming home has demoralised me. I had forgotten that man is a social animal while you were away. Upon my word I begin to think something of leaving off work and going to Constantinople instead. It's

a plan that was suggested to me some time ago. I've got some business there. That was one of the advantages of Ispahan," with a peculiar expression; "it is some distance from Constantinople."

"Well, provided you don't start on that fool's errand to Bagdad——"

"Urgent, in season and out of season, old fellow, eh? It is a foolish plan, I daresay; but I should have thought you would have appreciated it," smiling. "It was a painter's whim, the dream of *Un homme errant qui aime passionément le bleu.*"

"*Un homme errant?* an erring man, I should translate that," said Ferris, with a careless laugh.

And presently he went away. He went out into the open courtyard, out into the blazing sunshine, his steps echoing quickly across the sun-scorched stones;

and now a door slammed to behind him.

It was curious to watch the change which came over Lawrence. His whole expression altered suddenly, as only a sensitive face can alter. He worked on doggedly for a minute or two; he got up irresolutely; he took a turn about the room. A large portfolio of drawings was lying open on the chair where Ferris had left it. He glanced at it once or twice, and closed it sharply, with a muttered exclamation of disgust.

“By Jove, old George is right! It is a fool’s errand. It is late, too, for me to begin,” with a curious restrained contempt.

He took a piece of paper from his pocket: part of a letter, written in French, and in a woman’s hand. He stood looking at it quietly for a moment, his face

growing troubled, his lips set and stern. The paper was folded in such a fashion there was one sentence he could not help but read. It began abruptly :

——“June, in Constantinople ? But some time I know that you will come back to me. It may be now ; it may be long years hence, when all the beautiful youth has passed out of our lives, and you will look back to the days we were together, and your heart will go near to breaking to know that they can never come again. And it will have been your own fault, Denis. You have sworn never to see me again, and I know it, and I am waiting for you. I am waiting to be forgiven. *J'attends.*”

He crushed the paper hard between his

fingers. He drew a long deep breath ; his face had altogether lost its colour.

“ *Grand Dieu ! qu'elle était belle !* ” the young man said.

The broken fountain trickled slowly through the stillness, drop by drop, dripping down upon the marble floor. It was a silent afternoon ; only, now and then, the fig-trees rustled outside there in the sunlight ; a breath of warmer air stole through the doorway into the bare white-washed room. The cold thin light crept in at the high window ; the colourless stillness seemed to fall like a charm between him and the outer world. He paced up and down for a long time, thinking ; turning sharply at the corners, with knitted brow and a slow and resolute step. One of these turns brought him near the dripping fountain. He stopped and watched it with a curious smile. The

slow drops fell one by one into the brimming basin in shining circles that rippled and passed away. And the years of his life, as they too passed in mute succession before him, seemed hardly less purposeless, less fatally purposeless, than these.



## CHAPTER IX.

WHICH CONTAINS SOME ACCOUNT OF THE  
LAWRENCE FAMILY.

MISS MARIE DE BRAY had only been home three months from her French convent. Her letters to her five most intimate friends—they wrote to each other regularly twice a week, and it was an understood thing that they were *never* to forget one another—her letters to her late companions, then, were still full of delight and wonderment over her own dear home, and her dear father, and her dear brothers, and the dear old plantation life. This young lady, in a word, was

in the happiest, the most impressionable, the most sentimental frame of mind imaginable —when she met her cousin, Henry Lawrence.

It was on the occasion of that young gentleman's first visit to the South. He had been spending the winter in the neighbouring town of Richmond, and having awoke one fine morning with a racking headache, and a very indistinct recollection of its cause, it had occurred to him to have his horse saddled, and, like a dutiful nephew, to ride over and pay his respects to his old uncle and aunt.

What he thought upon meeting his cousin Marie has never transpired. But it was not long before people began to remark upon the fact that Mr. Lawrence's daily rides had assumed one invariable direction. His face had become familiar to every field-hand on the De Bray plantation. There was a standing quarrel among the younger

negroes as to who should hold Mars' Henry's horse. Indeed, so confirmed a habit had these visits become, that when one fine day he changed his hours and rode over early in the morning, he found the stable-yard deserted by all but the smallest and blackest of the grooms. It was a great opportunity for Zip.

"Mars' Edouard out shootin', suh," he said astutely, "Miss Marie gone done in the garden for flowers. Specs Miss Marie all alone dah, suh. Tank you, suh," catching the bit of silver with a grin.

Miss Marie *was* in the garden, and alone. She was picking winter roses when her cousin found her. It may be she had expected his coming, for she never looked up at his approach, bending her face down over her basket with cheeks that put to shame the paler winter flowers.

She had run a thorn into her hand ; she

showed him the scratch presently, looking up in his face the while with innocent brown eyes. It was the prettiest, the dearest little hand in the world, the young man declared, holding the trembling little fingers in his own, and——

“Nonsense, Harry!” the young girl says, turning away with a blush, and then—— Well then, Mr. De Bray, senior, who was also taking his morning stroll about the shrubbery, had the opportunity of witnessing a very pretty scene.

“Your mother wants you. I think you had better go in for a moment to your mother, Marie,” he observed some moments later, and in precisely the same tone of unvarying courtesy his daughter had always heard him use. And then, when Marie had crept away, “Well, sir!” the planter said, grimly, turning to his nephew.

Young Lawrence was indisputably a

Yankee. His home was in New England. He was known to have been somewhat wild at college. He was also known to have inherited a hundred thousand dollars at his father's death. And for three years back the De Bray cotton crop had hardly paid the cost of its transport to the north.

"Well, sir!" the planter said.

It was the finest wedding the De Bray family had seen for years. It was like old times, the oldest negroes told each other. And from little Zip in the stable-yard to the bevy of bridesmaids, come all the way from the Charleston convent to grace the great event, through all the gamut of black and white and yellow, there was not a voice but had some word of praise for Henry Lawrence. The truth is he was a very fascinating young fellow. When he took his bride to Saratoga Springs, Mr.

Lawrence was almost more of a social success than his beautiful young wife. For one thing, he cared more about this sort of pleasure than she did. The gentle convent-bred girl was more repelled than charmed by this first experience of the world. Her Southern education had never prepared her for a life where only the women were at leisure. She could not understand that gentlemen should be in business. These dashing energetic women frightened her. In a word, she was very shy, very proud, very ignorant, very much in love with her husband, perhaps a little jealous. And perhaps she had some reason for this latter feeling. Perhaps she was not so far wrong when she begged her husband to take her to their new home.

And this in spite of frequent warnings. "Graveport is a pretty old place, Marie. I've lived there all my life, and of course

I know every man, woman, and child in the village. But it's different for you; you won't find a soul to speak to there, remember. But a woman never knows when she's well off," her husband said.

Mrs. Lawrence listened with perfect incredulity. She was in no way apprehensive about her future neighbours. For had not Judge Poynter, the Member of Congress, the one great man of Graveport, called upon her here already? And had she not spoken to that nice young Mr. Carter, who had been so pleased to see his old friend Lawrence the day they met him in New York? who had told her so much about the Graveport woods and beaches; and had even offered, with a blush, to send her a copy of his little book of poems—"Translations from the German, and Other Verses"—whose forthcoming publication was the cause of his presence in the city, and

thus, in a remote way, if she would allow him to say so, had procured him the honour and pleasure of knowing Mrs. Lawrence?

Mrs. Lawrence accepted his compliments with perfect gravity and respect. She could not in the least understand why her husband should burst out laughing in the midst of them. This Mr. Carter was the first living author she had ever seen. She contemplated him with simple admiration. She was pleased to think that her Harry should be on familiar terms with such a literary star. And, like everything else, it tended to show what a remarkable man her Harry was.

But it was not until the early autumn that Mr. Lawrence took her home. A cool salt wind was blowing in from the sea as they got out at the small country station of Graveport. The yellowing elms rustled their branches in welcome against



a sky of deep and cloudless blue. The pale golden leaves fluttered down—the droppings of some unseen bridal torch—about the young wife's path.

They had been at home a week when Lawrence came in one morning and invited her to accompany him upon a drive. "I'm going down to the village," the young man observed carelessly. "There's nothing much else to do in this confounded dreary old hole. If we see Bill Carter I'll ask him to dinner, Marie. We're sure enough to find him too," with a laugh he did not trouble himself to explain.

Graveport is a typical New England village, an old seaport town grown too small for its shell—a town with large grass-grown wharves, where the tides come in unheeded, and the little boys fish for flounders, and a few old fishermen sit and gossip in the sun; a town very proud

of its elms, with wide and ill-kept roads, and staring white houses with inviolable gates and blinds. And, as the life of a New England home centres about the kitchen-door, so, in this village, it was only about the post-office and the market that a feeble show of activity made itself felt. The linen-draper displayed their goods more boldly to the public; Miss Richardson's bonnet-shop was gay with autumn fashions. There was a rival flourish of blue and crimson in the coloured globes at the chemist's window next door.

It was in front of this very apothecary's that Mr. Lawrence checked his horses.

"I thought you were going to call on Mr. Carter, Henry dear?"

"Oh, you come along with me," said dear Henry with a grin.

The little shop was empty when they entered it, but the drug-room door was

left ajar, and a potent smell of camphor, the subdued sound of pestle and mortar, gave evidence its proprietor was within. "Hollo, Carter, are you busy? Can you come out and see my wife?" said Mr. Lawrence.

Well, the apothecary came. He had on a gray alpaca coat, the sleeves of which were neatly turned back over his cuffs, and a large white apron was fastened about his waist; but this latter he hastily removed before shaking hands with his visitors across the counter. He welcomed them to Graveport. He quoted Tennyson. He took some flowers from a glass, and, wrapping their stems carefully in a piece of white paper with "Carter, Apothecary," stamped in coloured letters across it, he presented the whole with a neat little bow and speech to his old schoolmate's lady. "I don't need to ask you if you

want anything in our line this morning, Harry," he said; but he insisted upon mixing some sal volatile for Mrs. Lawrence, who indeed was sitting there speechless and pale with mingled surprise and mortification.

"You've been furbishing up the shop, old boy, since I was here," remarked that lady's husband, seating himself comfortably upon the counter, and looking about him with a knowing air. "Hollo, French soap? Why, Graveport's looking up in the fashionable world, Carter. And when are you coming to dine with us, by-the-way? Mrs. Lawrence has been dying to hear the last news about your book."

Mr. Carter grew pink with pleasure. He stammered something about appreciative souls; he produced the promised volume from his desk. It was handsomely bound in blue and gold; it was

perfumed with the best sachet powder; there was a dedicatory inscription upon the title-page; and a little girl coming in at that moment with a request for a box of rhubarb pills, "which father says the last wasn't made strong enough, Mr. Carter," the poet absolutely kept his customer waiting while he finished reading aloud a sonnet about the inner life.

And then on their way home, and for the first time, Mr. Lawrence found fault with his wife. "For the sooner you get rid of all these d——d Southern notions, why the better it will be for all of us," he remarked with perfect frankness. "Bill Carter not a gentleman? Well, he don't keep a crowd of lazy niggers to do his work for him, if that's what you mean. A man's a man in New England," said Mr. Lawrence, "and a gentleman afterwards. But you needn't have Carter at the house

if you don't like. Hurt his feelings? Nonsense! you're always bothering about people's feelings. I wish you had considered mine a little more before you insisted upon coming here; but that's just like a woman—never knows when she's well off. But it's precious badly off you'll find yourself, *I* can tell you, if you don't learn that Graveport is not in Virginia, my dear."

The golden leaves were still falling along her pathway as Mrs. Lawrence entered her home that day. The young wife stooped and picked a handful from the grass and looked at them wistfully. It may be she was remembering at that moment that here, too, was the sign of ended summer—and only the dead leaves between her and the drifting snow.

And so, from the very beginning, there was but little question of Mrs. Lawrence's

hardly to be wondered at that, long before the pale New England spring, the Lawrences had drifted back to the city. It was the last that Graveport saw of them for many and many a day. It is true that from time to time vague rumours would reach there of the fugitives: one year it was Mr. Carter who met them in New York, whither he had taken his wife upon a bridal tour; again it was old Miss Richardson, going up to Boston for her yearly collection of new fashions, who had chanced upon Marie face to face, "and looking not a day older, my dear, and her with all those little children;" and yet again the reports were of another character, and people shook their heads with melancholy satisfaction over the tales of young Lawrence's wild doings. "Poor Henry! he was always weak. But then, what could you expect with such a wife?" as

Miss Carter pertinently inquired. And then came the rumour that they had gone to Europe. And then, quite suddenly, the news that Mr. Lawrence was dead.

And almost before the excitement caused by this report had died away, one fine October morning a carriage stopped before the Lawrences' door. The unused gate creaked heavily as it turned upon its hinges; the lawn was strewn with withered leaves from the old elms overhead. As Miss Richardson hurried to her parlour window, she could see a black-clad figure pass through the brilliant sunshine among the dying leaves. The children were delighted with this rustling carpet; they crowded about her; they pulled at her dress; "but she didn't seem to take no notice nor nothing," Miss Richardson commented. And Graveport knew the widow had come home.



Little Denis was a pretty boy of eight or nine, his sisters—"the children," as the boy called them contemptuously—were still in the nursery, under old black Jenny's rule, at the time of this event; and it was perhaps but natural that, as the years went on, and they grew older, a thousand new ties and associations should spring up between them and the people of the village—ties and associations their mother could never understand. Indeed, to her dying day, this lady remained a stranger to the place. And, for that matter, her whole life was centred in her children: when she addressed her neighbours on any other subject it was with the air of a dethroned princess addressing her inferior. Since her husband's death she had become more French than ever. She surrounded herself with negro servants. At an age and in a community where a woman of thirty

is a faded, shattered, indomitable machine, she dressed herself in delicate and flowing robes of white, and knots of blue, and ruffles of lace about her beautiful helpless hands. In a land of sectarian prejudice, she was seen by credible witnesses drinking coffee on her lawn at four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, in company with several strangers, and one of these a Roman Catholic priest. "Settin' about a table on the grass like a lot o' Crazy Janes without house nor home, and her a widder woman, on the Sabbath! It's what I call a flying in the face of Providence," said Deacon Davis grimly.

But perhaps the two worst counts against the innocent sinner were, first, her attendance at the Catholic church, a small stucco chapel erected for the convenience of the Irish mill-hands, where Mrs. Lawrence sat every Sunday morning, looking serenely

beautiful and unconscious of her surroundings; and then the fact that—she rode. For in that land of invalid women and knock-kneed horses (harnessed on Sunday afternoons when the family “carry-all” was needed to take the family to church), it was Mrs. Lawrence’s practice to ride; and the fishermen by the shore, the few woodcutters amongst the pines had long since grown accustomed to the sound of muffled hoof-beats. The children had learned to watch for their coming, crowding to the window to see the gentle sad-faced lady canter by, and wonder at her boy.

“I met ’em again this aternoon. The Jedge was with ’em,” Mr. Jones would remark at dinner—Mr. Jones, a scrupulously accurate man, who had been known to add a date-stone to a pound of dates rather than give a customer short measure.

"I met 'em—trapesing about, as usual. The French madame had her lap full o' weeds, and the boy was a sticking a lot o' them purple asters in her hat. They seed me a-comin', and the madame she asked ater you, Mariar," with a side-glance at the sickly woman bending above the stove.

"Where was it, father?" asks the eldest girl.

"By them Folly Woods; near the cross-road. She was askin' her way to——"

"I know the place. Do tell! So she was there, was she? I used to go there to pull May-blooms when I was a girl. I hain't seen those woods these fifteen years or more," says Mariar, turning around to hush the crying baby in its chair. "Mary Jones, if you don't let that little brother o' yours alone——! and George, keep your fingers out o' that molasses, sir. You had

a genteel sufficiency an hour ago. What was she goin' after, father? Did she say?"

"After more weeds, I reckon. The way that woman litters up that house o' hern do beat the Dutch. Kiting across the country like a white pine-dog with a popple tail; and the Jedge with 'em too—a man o' his sense, and a professor of religion! I'd admire to know what that boy of hers can come to, seein' such goin's on," said Mrs. Jones.

And Mrs. Jones's was not the only speculation on this topic. For it was about this time, I think, that a certain interview took place.

Mrs. Lawrence had stayed at home that day. It was a still, warm, beautiful September afternoon. She was pacing up and down the garden-walk; the train of her white dress brushed against a glowing

border of brilliant autumn flowers; the yellowing leaves were floating down in the same old fashion from the frost-touched elms; the mild autumnal sunshine resting upon her flushed and pensive face—a fair and gracious and singularly youthful face it seemed in the eyes of the man who saw it.

“For you know, dear Mrs. Lawrence, it is impossible,” Judge Poynter was saying, in a voice which I doubt if anyone but this woman beside him would ever have recognised as his; “quite impossible. Your boy will grow up—how old is he now? fifteen? sixteen?—in five years’ time he will be a young man, with a life apart from yours, and you a young woman still.”

“I was six-and-thirty on my last birthday,” said Mrs. Lawrence.

“A young woman still; a charming

woman always. And to think of your throwing yourself away upon these people here! It is a shame, Mary—a waste, a criminal waste of faculties that were given you to be an ornament—yes, and an honour—to any society you deigned to enter, by Jove!” with a sudden relapse into the Edward Poynter of twenty years ago. “And as for this boy, he’s a fine little fellow, and a brave little fellow, and we’ll make an honest gentleman of him—a man you will be proud of, Mary. For the boy’s own sake I think you should say ‘Yes,’ my dear,” said the Judge.

I think she came very near saying it. She looked up at the handsome, stalwart, gray-haired man beside her. I think that she realised that here was a name and a position any woman might be proud to accept; and I think that for a moment she wavered. I am sure that after he had

left her—after she had watched him turn away sorrowful, incredulous, protesting—I am sure, I say, that she looked up at the serene beauty of the sky above her, that she looked around at the blazing garden-borders with quite a new sense of narrowness and loss. Perhaps it was only the natural regret of having wounded a friend ; perhaps some old thirst for a wider life, some forgotten but living capacity for enjoyment, for the pleasant excitement of admiration—the gracious privilege of giving pleasure—had been awakened by his words. There was an unusual flush on the widow's delicate cheek, an almost girlish embarrassment in her manner as she went forward to greet her son returning home from school.

“I'm late and I know it, and I couldn't help it,” that young gentleman remarked cheerfully, vaulting over the garden-gate



with a dexterous toss of his books at the grinning Jenny's head ; " I stayed to see Ned Mason's boat, and is she a beauty ? Ned's going to sea before long, mother. He can't stand it at home since Mrs. Mason's married again. Some people think it's queer of Ned to take it in that fashion ; but *I* don't wonder at it, you know," said Master Denis sagely. And to his dying day Denis Lawrence never guessed why his mother threw her arms about his neck and kissed him at that particular moment.

It was about this same time young Lawrence made up his mind to become a painter. Of course the lad had always had a taste for drawing. There was portfolio after portfolio full of sketches with " Denis Lawrence, fecit," in the corner, carefully stored away among his mother's treasures. But when he was about nineteen, it so

happened the boy spent a winter in New York. It was there that for the first time he saw the interior of an artist's studio ; it was there he abandoned all idea of college ; and it was then and there he decided to study abroad.

At first Mrs. Lawrence would not hear of his going to Europe. The very thought of his departure distracted her with grief. She implored him not to leave her. She wrote letter after letter to her brother at home, entreating him, adjuring him by his responsibility as a guardian, not to sanction her boy's departure. And in the midst of all this agitation, and quite unexpectedly, Mr. Edouard De Bray came north.

He arrived at Graveport one wintry evening, wrapped up to his eyes in fur pelisses and swearing violently and indiscriminately at the Yankees and their

climate ; and before twenty-four hours were over, and to the lad's intense surprise, the plans were entirely settled for Denis's sojourn in Paris.

His surprise might have been lessened perhaps had he known then what he only heard years afterwards—the purport of an interview which took place between his mother and his guardian the very night of the latter's arrival.

“*Ma sœur*, I have something to tell you,” said Mr. De Bray. He went to the door and locked it noiselessly. “Are your children, are your servants all in bed?” he asked. He took the widow by the hand, he led her gravely to the fire, and, stooping down before it, he whispered in her ear.

She started back with a low cry of terror.

“Hush ! someone may hear you,” the

Virginian said again, and with the same strange solemnity of manner.

The short gray-haired man standing before that fire, biting his nails and staring at the logs, had some of the authority of a martyr about him at that moment.

"It may take—all," he said slowly, stretching out his hand. "Virginia will need all, my sister," with uplifted head, and the passion of a lifetime flashing suddenly into the heavy face.

They settled about the boy's departure : he was to remain away a year.

"And you'll remember, my boy, you have given me your word—your word of honour as a De Bray—that you won't come home before that year expires," his uncle reminded him with peculiar significance.

The lad looked up curiously from his

imperturbable guardian to his mother's wan and tear-stained face.

"All right, sir. Not unless my mother sends for me," he said stoutly.

There was only a week before his vessel sailed, and yet, in the midst of all his wild excitement, the boy found time to wonder whatever that promise might mean.

He found out soon enough. He had not been three months in Paris when the catastrophe came. The flag was fired on at Fort Sumter, and for awhile the lad was half mad with rage and revolt.

"Our cousins, the other De Brays, have come back from the country. My cousin, the Vicomte, has married a wife young enough to be his daughter. She is one of the most beautiful women in Paris," he wrote to his mother on one occasion.

"They want me to paint her portrait; they ask me continually to go and see them; and have you not made it impossible? Shall I go to her house and let her think me a coward? or would you have me tell her how my own mother has cheated me like a child?"

It was the first serious breach between the mother and her son, and for a time it was difficult to say which suffered from it the most.

"You tell me I am a De Bray. I answer you I am an American," the young man wrote at last, in answer to one of the widow's piteous letters. "And you would have me stay here like a miserable sham, you would have me skulk like a girl out of reach of danger, when there isn't blood enough left in America to wipe out the insult to our flag. My

uncle may fight where he chooses; my place is at the North. I am coming to take it. I am coming home, mother. Three months from to-day the year I promised you is ended. I shall stay here three months from to-day."

He stayed three years. At last, one bleak December night, deep in the frozen heart of the New England winter, and when all the elms stood white and rigid beneath a three-days' fall of snow, at last Denis Lawrence came home. He came home a man, and it was with an indescribable pang of jealous sorrow the widow realised the fact: her boy was a boy no more.

She went in to see him that first night, creeping stealthily to the door of his room when all the house was hushed and silent. It was long after midnight, but a light

was burning on his table as she entered, and Denis was seated before it, his face haggard and wan, and buried in his hands.

He started and looked up at the sound of her gentle entrance. "Is that you, mother?" he said wildly. He clutched a portrait, some papers lying before him, and thrust them hastily aside.

"Why don't you go to sleep, my darling?" the mother asked, in the old, tender, well-remembered voice. She laid her hand upon her boy's forehead and smoothed back his tumbled hair. "Why don't you go to sleep, my boy?" she said trembling.

And Denis took his mother's hand in his and kissed it. There was but little need of explanation between those two.

The days went on and on. In spite of his mother's guest, Miss Poynter, it was



but a dull house now, this home to which young Lawrence had returned ; a poverty-stricken house, the young man thought with bitter mortification, remembering the life he had led in the years he had been away.

He chafed with inexpressible impatience at the thought of his own helplessness. There was no more talk of his going to the war now ; indeed, in those first days, the widow would hardly bear him out of her sight ; and Denis saw with alarm the change those few years had made in her appearance. He spoke of it repeatedly to Miss Poynter ; and there was but little to comfort him in the young girl's report.

"She is a good girl," the widow said, speaking of Charlotte in one of her many conversations with her son, "a good girl ; she has been a kind little companion to

me this summer. I missed your sisters sadly when they went away, Denis."

"My sisters had no right to leave you," the young man said.

"It is a dull house, my dear," said the widow, with her melancholy smile; "and Mrs. Poynter was very kind in inviting them; and the poor children needed society. They were glad to go. And yet I have done what I could for my children," said Mrs. Lawrence.

Another time she told him about the money that had been lost. "As for all the De Bray fortune it had gone—it had gone for a good cause," she said, her cheeks flushing painfully.

And then, presently, as Charlotte Poynter got up and left the room, "She is a good girl," the widow repeated, looking after her affectionately. "She will be very wealthy, Denis," she added timidly, after a moment,

"she will be wealthy, Denis; and you—oh my darling, if you knew how I have thought of you!"

"It was impossible," the young man said impatiently, "impossible." The very suggestion was irksome to him. "I have done with—— Miss Poynter's fortune is nothing to me," he said. He frowned as he turned away.

It was a dull winter certainly. The weeks seemed to stretch out to twice their normal length; the weary battle months rolled by with hardly a break in all their blood-stained monotony. It seemed to Denis sometimes that they were buried alive; he chafed against his captivity in bitter silence, carrying the newspapers to his own room and devouring their contents with eager humiliated eyes. He paid very little attention to the women of his household on those days,

and perhaps it was only natural that they should redouble in their efforts to please him. It was no easy matter at times, but little Charlotte persevered bravely. They had talked of Lawrence's coming for months before his arrival, and I have small doubt but the mother had made a hero of her boy.

One afternoon he was sitting with Miss Poynter in the studio. For some weeks past he had been engaged in making a study for a picture, a little bit of *genre*—a girl's head, an open window, and, beyond, a stretch of wintry sky. As chance would have it, he was that day in a particularly happy mood. Miss Poynter was an excellent sitter. He was trying a new process of his own, and the picture promised to be a success.

"I think, by Jove! I think I've got it this time, and no mistake," he said,

with quite a new satisfaction in his voice. He looked over to Charlotte for sympathy.

Miss Poynter was sitting by the widow, crying.

She had had a letter from her cousin Edward that morning. "He is coming—he is coming to take me away," the girl ended with a sob.

If Denis hesitated it was only for a moment. He laid down his palette and brushes deliberately; he crossed over to the little shrinking figure beside the window; put his arm about her waist. "Shall—shall I tell Judge Poynter you would rather stay here with me, Charlotte?" said Mr. Lawrence.

It was not a rapturous wooing. There was still light enough in the short winter afternoon to finish the picture after everything else was settled. And Denis

went back to his work. It was his first decidedly successful picture. "A charming bit of sentiment and colour," the critics called it. It was bought by Goupl in the course of the following summer. He sold it very well. "As though there was any use in *that*, while there is all my money lying idle, and you will not even take me where I could spend it," Mrs. Charlotte observed disdainfully. They had been married over six months, and this was not the first remark of the kind which young Mrs. Lawrence had made. It had been a singularly unsuccessful marriage from the first. And this not because Charlotte was a badly-intentioned or even a bad-tempered woman. She would have made a happy wife to some other man, Lawrence would think at times. And then very likely he asked himself how

it was that this poor little girl, with her exacting and unsympathetic nature, her cramped intensity of aim, should be doomed to this blind struggle with all the perplexities, the baffling disappointments of such a life as his? It was not an easy question to answer. "For, after all, I am exactly the same, my poor little Charlotte! I am exactly what I was when you wished—when you consented to marry me," he said to her one day; "I have not changed."

"Changed? no. But I thought you would," said Charlotte naïvely. And perhaps in those few words she had unconsciously summed up half of "the old woe o' the world."

It was at the end of one of their reiterated discussions upon the old, old subject—her desire to live in Paris. Paris! Like the recollection of some anterior

existence, the name came back to Lawrence with all its old luring suggestion of passionate delight. He shivered and closed his eyes. The face was there still—the old beautiful face. He stood up abruptly. “You cannot go. *I* have to content myself with home,” with sudden faltering in the well-trained voice.

His wife sat working by the window, some elaborate mechanical work which somehow seemed a part of her. She looked up now, glancing at him with helpless irritation, with pale persistent eyes.

“There was nothing to lose one’s temper about,” she said presently. “Goodness knows I don’t expect you to agree with me, Denis. I wish you would sit down and take a book or act like anybody else. You make my head ache walking up and down,” pressing one thin white hand against her temples; and, after a moment’s



silence : "I am not going down to Graveport again, I suppose you know that, Denis ? I am tired of the country ; I hate it. And you must stay where I do this summer, do you hear ? People are talking about you already," with fretful insistence, "people are talking about the way you neglect me for your mother, and we have not been married a year."

And this was to go on all his life. He stood with his back turned upon her, looking through the gathering darkness at the stretch of empty road. He had sold his liberty for this. And other men, other men—his face changing suddenly—they were at the South those others, fighting, themselves a part of all the grandeur, the splendour, and stress of a heroic cause ; while he—the thin, complaining voice jarred on his nerves with cruel iteration—it was

his part, he had chosen it, his part of all the possibilities of life.

He stood there a long time ; there were two paths opening out in life before him ; he stood there until he had made his choice. If there was temptation left in the old dreams, he foreswore it that night ; he thrust it from him. The life before him might be barren, but, come what might, he could live it like a man.

He looked up quietly. With a sudden revulsion of feeling he stooped and took his wife's hand in his. "I wish I could please you better, Charlotte," he said.

She was counting the stitches in her work ; she glanced up, her lips still moving.

"Don't," she said petulantly, and moved away her shoulder.

It was a little thing, but it hurt him afterwards to remember it, for it was

almost the last word they ever exchanged together.

Before nightfall Lawrence was speeding eastward in answer to an urgent telegram. It was not even his mother who had sent it, and with a terrible sinking of the heart he hastened on his journey, the slow night dragging on before him, and she, it might be, drifting beyond his reach.

It was an hour or two before morning when he reached Graveport. A foggy, summer night, "white with the whiteness of what is dead"—a night of ghastly silence, through which you rather felt than heard the low grind of the distant waves upon the beach. He reached the house, his footsteps echoing loudly down all the wet and silent street. He went in. The door had been left open; a light was flaring in the draught. There were voices and people in the hall; he passed them all

unheeded, with rigid face, with slow and heavy footsteps — he was going to his mother. It was old Jenny who opened the door to him. There was a smell of incense in the room. He saw a white bed, some people standing about it.

“ ‘Pears like as if she had been waitin’ for you, Mars’ Denis,” the old woman said, her black face twitching convulsively; “ ‘waitin’ for the turn o’ the tide.”

He went up to the bed. She was lying there very quietly, but she opened her eyes and looked at him as he bent over her. Her lips moved painfully :

“ Charlotte ?”

He took her hand in his.

“ Yes, dear, yes. We are very happy together,” he said soothingly.

A light of sudden joy filled all the dying woman’s face.

“ My boy !” she said. She gathered up

her strength in one supreme effort and turned and laid her lips against his hand.

The man in black rose from his knees and made the sign of the cross devoutly.

"The Blessed Virgin give you strength to bear your loss, my son," he said; and Denis looked at him stupidly.

"She is gone. Gone!" with a pitiful incredulous smile.

Old Jenny had dragged herself moaning to the window; she threw it wide open now with the dumb wordless superstition of her race. The wind had risen; the night air rushed in clammy and chill. The harassed trees creaked painfully through the silence, their dark arms tossing wildly against the paling sky. Already the swift summer night was ended; already the light was breaking over the storm-vexed waves; the morning tide was ebbing to the sea.

And presently came morning—the cheerful common day, filling the world with pleasant stir and sound ; and later on Judge Poynter had arrived, coming back from the dead woman's room with a face which moved even Denis to faint companionship of sorrow. It was the first thing that had roused him ; and now, towards evening, he began to write letters. There were despatches to be sent ; his sisters to be summoned. His wife——

All day he had been conscious of people moving about him ; moving with decent and kindly pretence of sorrow, with lowered and respectful voices, and muffled footsteps that seemed to jar slowly, one by one, upon his brain.

Now, as he paused to listen, it seemed to him that these footsteps moved more hastily ; there were people crowding before the house. Well, it was nothing to

him ; and there was still his wife to write to. His wife !

The door opened and let pass two men ; one of them was Judge Poynter. "It was kind of him to come again, very kind," Lawrence said, getting up mechanically, and facing him, his hand grasping the back of a chair. He had been writing to Charlotte——

The Judge looked at his companion. "Tell him," he said hoarsely ; he threw himself down in a chair and covered his face. Denis watched him curiously, he stood there watching him through all the broken story which followed, and by a sort of double consciousness, taking it all in the while with ghastly clearness of detail—Charlotte's impatience at his sudden journey, her jealous following. "She was always difficult to manage, poor girl, poor girl," the Judge broke in with a sob—and

then the crowded transport train—a broken rail—an accident.

“It was the will of God, my son,” the priest said solemnly; and Denis turned and looked at him. The will of God; and this man, this good-hearted Irishman with his coarse red hands knew all about it? The will of God?—repeating the words after him with patient effort to understand—the will of God, and poor futile little Charlotte *dead!*

“My poor boy,” the Judge said, wringing his hand, “my dear boy, if you could only make an effort—rouse yourself.” There was something in the patience of the young face that turned and looked upon him which struck the old man dumb.

And after they had left him—the Judge coming back from the door again to ask what he could do—when they had left



him alone it was still this same shocked sense of the incongruous which would keep uppermost. His mother—his mother was a saint, the tears coming slow and burning to his eyes; but Charlotte, poor little Charlotte, crushed out of life, alone, the familiar little voice hushed, its complainings ended! A week ago those thin tenacious hands had seemed strong enough to shape all the coming years for him, and now——

The room was growing full of shadows. He rose mechanically and walked over to the window and looked out. The habitual attitude brought back its own shock of remembrance. Again he saw a white road stretching out through the twilight, and leading—where? Some boys were tramping cheerily homeward, singing in rude chorus the refrain of a soldier's song. He beat time to the words unconsciously,

the light coming steadily into his eyes. He drew a deep breath, and stood up suddenly. Life was not all his own yet it seemed; not his own while there was work—that work—to do.

END OF VOL. II.



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